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ALL WE POSSESS

'We possess nothing in the world,' wrote Simone Weil, '—a mere chance can strip us of everything—excepting the power to say "I".' In this new novel Edward Hyams examines the lives of a man and the woman he loves, both of whom cripple themselves in the service of themselves. For each of them, self-regard is the obstacle to happiness.

Edward Tillotson's career in the ordinarily selfish pursuit of his own advancement leads him into breaking practically every commandment. Yet he is guilty of nothing but seizing such opportunities to get ahead as life offers him. Launched on the world in his late 'teens, he is soon set on a course which engages him in the rat-race to success. Meanwhile the Furies—Mr. Hyams's own version of them—who always belabour their victims with bladders, not cudgels, lead Tillotson into committing something uncomfortably like murder. It is the passionless lust of others that finally brings him and the woman he loves to humiliation, and to the realization that there is no slavery so unendurable as slavery to oneself.

Edward Hyams's penetrating assessment of the world in which we live, and his implied views of the nature of true happiness, invest this ambitious novel with wisdom and poignancy. There is also a grim comedy in the loathing which his stiff-necked lovers come to feel for the life they have created for themselves. This mature novel is a brilliant successor to *Taking it Easy*, a book which was received with acclaim by the critics.

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A TIME TO CAST AWAY
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INTO THE DREAM
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FROM THE WASTE LAND
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All We Possess

EDWARD HYAMS



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This is entirely a work of fiction. All characters
and incidents are imaginary, and any resemblance
to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental.
E. H.

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To my friend John Catlin
with affection

'We possess nothing in the world—a mere chance can strip us of everything—excepting the power to say "I". That is what we have to give to God—in other words to destroy. There is absolutely no other free act which it is given to us to accomplish—only the destruction of the "I".'

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

PART ONE

SELF

'I couldn't say what the thing it is sitting on is supposed to represent. It looks broken.'

James Thurber, *The Owl in the Attic*

I

THE night before Edward Tillotson went to begin his first job his father pointed out that his life was about to begin in earnest and added, what he had often said before, that Rudyard Kipling's *If* was one of the greatest poems in the language. Edward went to bed and at eight o'clock the following morning appeared at Mr. Pardoner's office. Mr. Pardoner was the head of the department he had been appointed to in Mendoza & Son's, most of whose vast factory in Brougham Square, N.W.17, smelt of tobacco. But the long sorting-room you had to walk down to reach Mr. Pardoner's office had a strange, sour smell which was repulsive and exciting. Edward did not at once realize what it was. It was the smell of girls. Two hundred of them sat at the immensely long sorting tables, not yet starting work because the travelling bands from the postal delivery room had not started to move with their eternal load of letters asking for canteens of cutlery, toby jugs, ping-pong sets, Bibles and wireless sets. The girls sat or stood about, changing shoes, putting on overalls, fiddling with their hair, making up their faces, in a seethe of nervous movement, and talking, talking; an undertone of unmodulated twitter, overtones of sudden piercing hoots, which might be cries of anger or mirth; or just noise for its own sake.

Walking the length of that room was ordeal by girl; something to be attempted in fear and accomplished in triumph, like the first time Edward had jumped a horse over a gate, down at his Uncle Walter's near Goudhurst. But it mercifully happened on this first occasion, with no work started and so nothing to bore them into seeking a passing distraction, that the girls took no aggressive notice of him: one or two turned and stared after him; one or two pointed him out to friends and laughed. As he reached Mr. Pardoner's office, with his own desk just outside it in a sort of pen, a stout woman who might have been the daughter of many generations of sergeant-majors mated with police matrons, rang a bell and there was a scramble subsiding into brief silence as the travelling bands started to move and the first letters of the day were spewed on to the tables.

Edward went straight into Mr. Pardoner's office without knocking, driven by the mortifying sense of mockery behind him as, when

a child, he had been terrifyingly certain of a hostile, following presence when he was sent upstairs, into the darkness of the second or third floors of his father's house, to fetch something for his father or Mrs. Olantigh. His face was flushed and his eyes were hunted, and when Mr. Pardoner looked up from his papers, which were spread all over the desk, he said:

'Hallo! Those girls been chi-iking you?'

'I don't know,' Edward said.

'You would if they had.'

'I mean, I don't know what chi-iking means.'

Mr. Pardoner frowned thoughtfully: his face was like Don Quixote's in the old, illustrated edition Mrs. Olantigh had given Edward; long, dark, deeply lined so that the flesh, for all its leanness, was draped in vertical folds, like an ample curtain; his eyes were often lowered with a kind of modesty, or to hide the gleam of irony, under lofty, arched eyebrows of a singular nobility of line.

'You're entitled not to know that,' he said. 'One uses such terms without realizing that they have never been defined. I think one might define chi-ike as, let me see, to make game of someone by uttering provocative cries.'

Edward thought he was being sarcastic, because he talked a little like the maths master they had called Sarky Sid in the life he had been leading up to four weeks ago, at C.S.B., the Collegiate School for Boys. But it was not so; and Edward was not long in discovering that almost any point of purely academic interest would serve to distract Mr. Pardoner from the work of his, as he called it, 'gainful occupation'. 'For, you see,' he was to assure Edward, not many weeks later, 'this work is not my job. I am a mathematician. I am a church organist; I am, possibly, a composer of church music. But I am not allowed to practise these trades. *They*, that sinister and anonymous force, wish me to organize the giving of free gifts—as if a gift could be anything but free!—to my fellows, in order to persuade them to smoke very indifferent tobacco at a price which will keep Mr. Isaac Mendoza and young David Mendoza, and their women, in the style they are accustomed to.' But that explanation came later; at the time Edward thought Mr. Pardoner was another Sarky Sid, and resented his tone. He said, 'They uttered no provocative cries.'

Mr. Pardoner looked up; had he worn spectacles he would have been peering over them. 'Rest assured, Tillotson,' he said, 'that they will; and you will have to get used to it. And now sit down and let's have a look at you.'

Edward sat down across the desk from him. They had met only once before, for five minutes, in the Personnel Manager's office. That had not been an occasion to heighten any sense of his own importance Edward might have had. The Personnel Manager had said, 'Here's your new assistant, Mr. Pardoner. Name of Edward Tillotson. He is eighteen and he has his school cert. That's about all I know. But I suppose you don't need a genius in your department?'

'A willing cretin could do the work, Mr. Cohen.'

'So I imagined. Goosewalk, in Advertising, wanted to do our advertising people a good turn and this young man's father's a pal of theirs.'

Now, however, Mr. Pardoner said, 'Why did you come here?'

'I had to have a job somewhere.'

'There could be no other reason. Are you ambitious, Tillotson?'

'I don't know.'

'Well, what, if anything, are you interested in?'

'Electricity,' Edward said. It seemed to be the only answer he could think of, or the only viable one among the number which would no doubt have been equally true. He could hardly say girls; or the old trees in Overbury Park; or music; or going down to his Uncle Walter's; or horses.

'Why didn't you "go in" for it?' Whenever Mr. Pardoner used such expressions he put them into audible inverted commas. By way of answer, Edward quoted his father:

'There is no way to. At the bottom end there are thousands of unemployed, and at the other end you need degrees or diplomas I haven't got.'

'Do the mathematics of the subject interest you?'

'Yes. But I'm supposed to be slow at learning and my father says I won't concentrate. We . . . we couldn't afford college.'

'You and I will get on like a house on fire. The mathematical side of music is my hobby. Do you know anything about harmonics?'

'Only the harmonics of tuned circuits.'

'The analogues between our subjects are close.'

Mr. Pardoner leaned back in his chair and talked and Edward began to like him. Even the way Mr. Pardoner said 'our subjects' suggested that he, Edward, had serious interests, above wages and the kind of thing implied by most people in the words *my job*. Not that this point of view, peculiar to such nearly extinct classes as artists, craftsmen and gentlemen, was entirely new to him. But it was familiar

in a debased form: as manifest in his father and Mrs. Olantigh and their friends it had come to be taken by Edward as a vulgar fraud and he had, perhaps too hastily, assumed that it was always so. But now he seemed to recognize it as genuine and to be cherished, at which satisfactory point Mr. Pardoner broke off and said, 'But we are wasting our employer's time. The work you have to do here is simple. This, as you know, is the free-gifts department. Do not ask yourself why, in a glorious world with most of its resources untapped and half its population starving, unclad and inadequately housed, several hundred lives and several million pounds of treasure have to be spent annually in bribing people with rubbish, to poison themselves. That way madness lies. The coupons given away in our cigarette packets return here together with forms stating the customer's choice of gifts. Those girls out there deal with the letters, putting each one into a work-envelope of instructions to the stores, postal, and records departments . . . ' He rummaged among the papers on his desk until he found what he sought, and handed it to Edward: it was a quarto buff envelope with a grid printed on it, each space headed by a rubric . . . STORES, MAIL, RECORDS . . . Mr. Pardoner went on explaining the work of his department, and Edward half listened, still preoccupied with what he had been saying before they came to business matters. Words of his manager's explanation jumped out at him, like alarming jacks-in-boxes to scare him into diligent attention, but in vain. 'Gummed addressed labels . . . typing pool . . . form covering letters . . . Mr. Isaac Mendoza's signature . . . ' And his conclusion:

'The gifts are diverse, from propelling pencils to motor-cars, by way of domestic appliances, cutlery, crockery and cosmetics.'

'Motor-cars?'

'Quarter of a million coupon units. We have never had one claimed yet. But one of our chief competitors, Carrera's, for example, offer better tobacco, so our bid for trade has to be high. Nobody ever claims a car but it looks well in the advertisements.'

'Where do I come in, sir?'

'You are my snag chaser. Snags can and do arise all along the line. You trace the origin of the trouble and report to me. I rectify it. Among the difficulties are unreadable letters, parcels lost in the post, complaints of unsatisfactory gifts, miscounts of coupons . . . but you will soon get into the way of it.'

'I see.'

'You do not sound enthusiastic, Tillotson, and I cannot say I

blame you. As we are to work together it will be as well if I explain my point of view about our job here. To begin with, our employer is a Jew . . .'

He paused, as if for comment; and Tillotson, with the faintest flush of what looked a little like shame, said:

'Does that make some kind of difference?'

'It does, although it has become difficult, and will become more difficult, to say honestly and objectively what difference, since the conduct of the Nazis and their Chancellor set us all back a thousand years. Those of us with more liberal opinions are being driven into a self-protective and necessarily false pro-Semitism.'

'Yes, I see.'

Mr. Pardoner may have noticed something a shade overstrained in the young man's manner for he looked at him curiously; but he said nothing about it, and presently continued, saying that working for Jews meant that one was spared all claptrap about service and loyalty and, ' . . other big words, Tillotson, which have become very small, shrivelled and shamefaced words, words like old, tired whores, Tillotson, standing at the receipt of custom on the dim corners of blind alleys in shabby provincial cities, pretending still to the charms of youth and hot blood . . .' He checked himself and said, curtly:

'Get here on time, but not a moment sooner. Leave here on time, neither sooner nor later. I do not advise the zeal usually recommended to young men in your situation because it will not answer. Your job is just a job, and has no future and it would be misleading to pretend that it had. If your father has influence, let him get you into that advertising agency Cohen spoke of, after a decent interval here. You will still be in the *demi-monde* of commerce, but at a higher level.'

And as Edward was leaving the office with orders to sit at his desk and read the paper until the supervisor of the girls, Mrs. Mills, introduced herself and brought him his first task, he was, perhaps, looking hang-dog; for Mr. Pardoner raised his eyes from his paper again and said:

'Don't be cast down, Tillotson. If I were you I should work at those maths and electricity. They are adult occupations.'

If Edward had been slightly disturbed by Mr. Pardoner's treatment of the Jewish question it was not only because his grandfather on the maternal side was Jewish—Edward's mother was French—but his name was Dreyfus. Edward's share of Jewish blood was not

large since old M. Dreyfus was only half-Jewish and had been brought up a Catholic, although reverted, in old age, to the religion of his paternal ancestors. And Edward had not even been properly aware of his embarrassing distinction until the new school of politics in Germany thrust it upon his attention. The behaviour of these young Nazis made Edward indignant on the rare occasions when he paid any attention to it and a mild irritation against the Jews for being persecuted. But he also felt a little bit guilty and slightly ashamed, even though only one-eighth of the blood in his veins was Jewish.

His father was a dialogue-polisher by trade, although on official forms he filled in the space for 'Occupation' with the word 'Writer'. He had set out to be a man of letters through one of those correspondence schools which claim to teach the art, while earning his living as a junior in an advertising agency, where he helped to write the copy for advertisements. He wrote short stories and sent them to magazines but they were always returned. When, later in life, he mentioned this, he also pointed out that nearly all these magazines had since failed and gone out of business; and, perhaps conscious that the implication was wanting in modesty, he would add, 'I am a craftsman, Edward. But not, alas, an artist. I can shape'—the gesture he used to illustrate that word always outlined an opulent female form in the air—'but I cannot create, and it has been a grief to me.'

But if Mr. Tillotson had none of the artist's gifts, he had the temperament. Irked by employment under orders, as a freelance he was capable of self-discipline, and hard, sustained work. His chance to cast off the yoke of service came when the advertising agency which employed him had a hand in a documentary film which was being sponsored by a client. The dialogue which had been written for it was unsatisfactory and Mr. Tillotson re-wrote it. The film was being made by a small company, but one of its directors was an accountant and financier who had become a leading figure in the film industry, which appears, indeed, to be always in the hands of *entrepreneurs* drawn from all the trades and professions excepting the cinema. His name was Reuben Lipschitz and the work of many of his other companies was frequently held up by unsatisfactory dialogue in the scripts. By his intervention Mr. Tillotson began to receive offers of work from them; and as it was quite well paid he took a chance and, although he had just married, turned freelance. His wife being French, with her help, until he could dispense with

it, he also did translations from the French for English and American publishers; it was not well paid but he worked extremely fast and straight on to the typewriter. His rate for the job was thus about thirty shillings an hour. A great deal of the quality of the original works was no doubt lost to the English reader, but as often as not Mr. Tillotson's linguistic short-cuts were taken by the reviewers for the Latin terseness of the originals. He made an adequate living by these means.

Edward's mother was a plump, jolly girl with a round face and bright blue eyes. Edward did not remember much about her. Mr. Tillotson had met her at a party: she had come to England as a nursemaid-companion to get away from her family because of the unpleasantness following her father's reversion to the religious practices of his ancestors, which had horrified her mother, who had filled the house with priests trying to check this backsliding. Her father had retaliated by calling in a posse of rabbis, and the religious warfare which ensued made the house intolerable.

When Edward was seven his mother could not put up with his father's carryings-on any longer; nor with Overbury Park in north-west London, where they lived because Mr. Tillotson had inherited a house there, unsaleable but inhabitable. She left him and returned to France and divorced him. The co-respondent—there was an embarrassment of choice—was a Mrs. Olantigh who, as Mr. Tillotson himself said, was a very cultured woman although she wrote for the women's magazines. She had had a small but gratifying success with the better sort of critics when she published a book which, although it was written in English, was entitled *A la recherche des repas perdus*, a collection of all the meals and comestibles which appear in Proust's great book, together with recipes: the women's page editor of a Sunday newspaper picked her recipe for the *petite madeleine* of *Swann's Way* and made quite a little feature of it. It enhanced Mrs. Olantigh's literary standing. In later life Edward recalled his father's mistress as an essentially steatopygous figure, one of those women whose flexible bodies acquire breasts and bottoms in a matter of days when fashion changes them from flat to round; and shed them as quickly when the reverse change occurs. But he was grateful to her for teaching him to read books which she knew were 'good', and he acknowledged that he owed her a great deal one way and another, if merely for never trying to be a mother to him. The only thing he ever had against her was that she would not, like his mildly affectionate, good-natured mother, let him go alone

over the railway tracks by the iron bridge, and into the park, where there was a kangaroo in an enclosure and an emu in another, grass to play on and trees to climb when the old keeper was not looking.

What Edward liked most in his life was going to his Uncle Walter Tillotson's, who had a smallholding near Goudhurst. His uncle and aunt were very different: Walter Tillotson was an excessively religious man and it made him miserable because he feared, for some reason which was never clear, that he was not 'justified'. Sin, and the spiteful politics of the West Kent Egg and Tomato Marketing Board, comprised his whole life. His wife kept her patience and good nature by loving him. And she was the grown-up in Edward's life who gave him confidence by loving him and welcoming his love for her. With that comfort behind him he could ride his bicycle to the coast or spend days in the company of his friends. He had made friends with the son of a farmer named Tuff, and with his friends. Together they stood at the periphery of the fields where corn was being reaped, and got wildly excited in chase of the fleeing rabbits—there were no combines, nor myxamatoxis, then. He rode his friend's old pony and it turned out that he had a good natural 'seat' and light hands and Mr. Tuff let him ride a horse he kept for his own pleasure, and even taught him to jump. And in the hot, sticky and harassing sexual curiosity of the mid-teens Edward mauled a girl called Eileen Figgis about, when she would let him: not that she was prudish; but, opulently female at fourteen, she had many calls on her time.

When Edward told Mr. Pardoner that he had had to take what job he could get, it was true: Mr. Tillotson's attitude to the question of further education was a simple one; he said that he had no money and Edward no brains. This would not have mattered now, but Edward Tillotson left school not much after the time of public-school and ex-officer vacuum-cleaner salesmen, of Welsh miners' choirs begging in Regent Street, of unemployed practising a kind of *ahisma* by lying down on the road to stop traffic in Oxford Street as a protest against being excluded from the right to work or to eat anything but bread and scrape. All this did not seem to be anything to do with Edward, so that it did not make him grateful for his job at Mendoza & Son's factory.

As it took an hour from Overbury Park to Brougham Square, and longer when it was foggy, Edward had to leave home at seven. He did not like getting up in the dark and going out into the sodden, icy streets with their permanent film of thin grey mud; but if he arrived at the factory with his distaste showing in his face, Mr.

Pardoner would say something like, 'Do not let me see you repining, Tillotson. This is how we live now. Hold up your head man, you're the heir of all the ages.' Another time he said, 'It was to enable you to sit counting coupons between two layers of dirt that Adam delved and Eve span. Consider, as you plod, frozen, stuffed with burnt porridge, and breathing your daily ounce of poisonous particles, that all over this precious gem set in a silver sea, men, women and children are doing even as you; the lucky ones, that is; the other three or four million have nowhere to plod to.' Or he would come out of his office to find Edward, in common with half the girls, coughing the morning journey's filth out of their lungs; and, placing a hand on his shoulder, say, 'Reassure yourself, Tillotson. As far south as we are here, the impurities in the air very rarely corrode metal door-handles. And this, you know, is what we exchanged for hunting the aurochs on a fine, frosty morning in a valley full of the chuckling of running water. Progress, Tillotson, progress: let that be your guerdon.'

And one day, happening to meet together outside Mendoza's in the street as they were returning from lunch, Edward and Mr. Pardoner watched a long, dismal file of men in clumsy, dirty clothes, holed boots and cloth caps, who bore banners calling for work and bread, making their way across Brougham Square to one of the last hunger-marchers' demonstrations before the prospect of war set armourers thriving and millions free from the prospect of a lifetime's half-starved idleness, and substituted death by bombs and bullets. For a couple of minutes they watched in silence and then Mr. Pardoner turned aside and led the way into the building.

'To think,' he said, as they went side by side up the stairs, 'that there are fools who hold the tale of the casting out of our first parents from Eden to have been a myth. But the curse of God is unconscionably long, Tillotson.'

The burnt porridge he used as a symbol for Edward's breakfast in the dark mornings was of his own getting. Mrs. Olantigh's 'woman' did not come in until eight-thirty, and although Mrs. Olantigh said that she would get up at six and cook him a meal, and perhaps might have done it, Edward's father would not hear of it. He said:

'I really do not see, Edward, why Maud should wait on you. It will do you good to be thrown on your own resources.'

Mr. Tillotson could have afforded a servant living in the house; but when they did have one he used to let her wages 'stand over just

for a week', until he owed her twenty pounds or more and had trouble in finding it, and there were rows and hysterics and threats of writing to *John Bull* which, despite the downfall of the great demagogue Horatio Bottomley a decade ago, was still the people's equivalent for issuing a writ. It was probably Mrs. Olantigh who persuaded him that they would be more comfortable and independent with just a daily woman.

Edward no longer had his annual two months at Goudhurst to look forward to, but only two weeks, and it was not possible to take any interest in his work. If it had not been for the mathematics of the sine curve, and later for Doris, he would have become very dejected and demoralized.

As for the sine curve, one day when Mr. Pardoner came in from lunch at The Bald-faced Nag (meat and two veg.), he stopped beside Edward's desk and caught him staring at his hands, as if he wondered what they were for. He stood there looking down at Edward from his great height out of his dark face and when his assistant made to stand up, put a hand heavily on his shoulder to hold him down and said, 'Do you day-dream, Tillotson?'

'No, I don't,' Edward said. It was a lie, of course: but his father was very much against day-dreaming, he said it was a 'debilitating habit'. That would not have made much impression on Edward, who although not consciously despising his father, often found himself instinctively looking for the good in what Mr. Tillotson disapproved of. But somehow or other the idea of day-dreaming had become mixed up in his mind with the idea of another secret, juvenile and more furtive indulgence which his father had suspected him of when he was about eleven or twelve, not without reason, and of which he had made Edward afraid and ashamed. He never accused him of this practice: but he frequently warned him against it in a very meaning way, fixing his eyes on the boy's hotly flushed face with a kind of probing earnestness and saying, 'It causes a weakening of the constitution and blindness.' He was full of such curious lore. 'And if,' he said sometimes, 'if you know any of your school-fellows who . . . (he used such words as school-fellows, women-folk,) who . . . er . . . do it, avoid them like the plague.'

It was this confusion in Edward's mind which made him say that he did not day-dream, to which Mr. Pardoner replied that he did not believe him and went straight on:

'Day-dreaming is an engine of power, Tillotson. Doubtless you have been unfavourably impressed by the example of Alnaschar.

Put that fable out of your mind. Alnaschar's trouble was not that he was a day-dreamer, but that he was a fool. You will find the habit valuable on condition that you base it on something substantial. Dream that you are what you can become; not a duke with a deer-park or a pasha with a harem, but, let us say, an eminent mathematician or, if yours is a more practical bent, a successful electrical contractor. Does it occur to you that I sound rather like Kipling in an off moment? Forgive me, Tillotson. I mean only this, that it is as well to make our vices serve our virtues; it is what they are for.'

The next day he stopped at Edward's desk at the same time, but he was working, with small, counted piles of coupons laid out like some kind of patience game. Mr. Pardoner put down three shabby books and said, 'I have no further use for them so they are not an expensive present. I hope, however, that they may prove valuable.'

He went into his room before Edward could thank him. One of the books was a thin one, only seventy-two pages, *The Sine Curve and its deformation by harmonics*, by J. D. Abrams, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Physicists consider it a very good book indeed. The other books were Simmonds on *Calculus* and W. J. Pardoner on *The Simple Mathematics of Alternating Currents*. It was this one that Edward opened and looked at first; and the first time he had to go into Mr. Pardoner's office, he said, 'Are you W. J. Pardoner, sir? I mean, did you write that book?'

'Yes, Tillotson, I wrote it. And much good it ever did me! Until I was kicked out in nineteen-twenty I was a Torpedo Officer in the Royal Navy. As, doubtless, you know, Torpedo Officers are the electrical specialists. I was foolish enough to take politics seriously in those days and even, if you will believe me, to sympathize with the Bolsheviks. I objected to going to Murmansk to kill socialists, so the Navy and I parted company. *Hinc, Tillotson, illae lacrimae*——' Mr. Pardoner pretended to mop up his tears—'Meanwhile I had been struck by the analogues between electrical and musical harmonics. And so I wrote the book I have just given you. And while I was leaving the Navy, my book remained—as one of the textbooks for Torpedo Officers and ratings.'

Edward did not like to ask Mr. Pardoner why he had not gone into the electrical industry. Besides, young as he was, he had begun to realize that Mr. Pardoner was one of those men who do not manage their lives, but blunder from one false position to another.

There was nothing remarkable in Edward's reading the books Mr. Pardoner had given him and in following what might almost be

called courses of study suggested by them. He applied himself because he was bored; and he discovered that there was substance in Mr. Pardoner's claim that there was more satisfaction in dreaming of a gratifying future if the present provided some foundation for such dreams. It was not altogether unreasonable to picture himself making some profitable electrical discovery since he was engaged in studying alternating currents; whereas he could not reasonably see himself inheriting a fortune, since nobody in his family ever had any money.

But as if to mock this process of reasoning, he was not half way through Abrams and had worked only three of the simplest examples in Simmonds, and read three chapters of W. J. Pardoner, when he was left some money. He received the news when he reached home one night an hour and a half late, for the bus had had to crawl through smog, though the name had not then been coined. It was, perhaps, the French or Jewish blood in his veins, but Edward had never been able to rejoice in smog, and was not, like the newspapers, proud of it, as if it were a great national achievement. Yet this particular specimen of smog served a purpose, by ensuring that he reached the house in a very bad temper and consequently did not give way to his father in the argument which arose out of his legacy.

Mr. Tillotson must have come out of the living-room as soon as he heard Edward's key in the lock, for he was in the hall waiting for him as he entered the house, and he immediately said, 'Your grandpa has died of a heart attack.'

As Mr. Tillotson had not spoken to his father for twenty years and Edward knew that there had never been any affection between them, he did not say that he was sorry, nor did he realize that his father was distressed; not that by dying an unloved parent puts himself or herself eternally in the right, leaving the unloving son or daughter a prey to irrational remorse. Edward said something like 'Oh' or 'Really?' and his father, unreasonably hurt by this indifference, said, angrily, 'Well, you might say something. How would you be feeling if I had died of a heart attack?'

'I'm sorry,' Edward said, 'but I only saw him once, when I was little. And I didn't think you felt . . .'

'He's left you some money,' his father interrupted hastily, perhaps anxious to avoid going into his feelings on the occasion. 'It was his solicitor who wrote, and as you're the only legatee, he mentioned it.'

'Good Lord!' Edward said, checked the impulse to ask how much, and said 'Thanks' to Maud Olantigh who put her head round the living-room door to say that there was a plate of food keeping warm in the oven for him—they had high tea, not dinner. Edward knew that his grandfather had been living in a home for the aged, but even so he had time to see himself going into a great, glittering show-room and writing a cheque for a Rolls-Royce in which to drive to the South of France where they had no smog, and there keep a high-class tart in a flat decorated in gilt and brocade, before his father, following him into the kitchen, could say, 'Don't you want to know how much?'

'All right,' Edward said, 'how much?' He went to the oven and took out a plate of fish and chips. Maud Olantigh always said that fish and chips was the '*pièce de résistance* of English *cuisine*' and that it was silly to be snobbish about it; she had even earned six guineas for saying this in a magazine read by women who did not eat fish and chips. Edward saw that the chips had dried hard into little mahogany-coloured sticks, but he disliked them less in that condition than in the pale and flabby state.

'Two hundred pounds,' his father said. A moment since Edward had been spending money at that rate per hour; it turned out to be his whole fortune; yet it still seemed like riches. 'I shall invest it for you,' his father added.

Edward put his plate on the table and got a knife and fork from the dresser drawer and looked at him. He was wearing a soiled woollen dressing-gown over a collarless striped shirt; the neck-band was dirty. His trousers sagged dismally over carpet slippers below the skirt of the gown. There was a dark bristle on his chin. His hair, yellowish-grey in the raw kitchen light, stuck up in a crest. Edward thought, 'The old are disgusting,' and said, 'Aren't I to have the money, then?'

'Your grandpa cannot have intended you to have it until you are of age.'

'May I see the lawyer's letter?'

'I wish you wouldn't talk with your mouth full,' Mr. Tillotson said, and put his hand into the pocket of the dressing-gown. He kept it there and watched his son eating for a full half-minute. Then he took it out, holding the letter, and put it down beside Edward's plate. Edward said, 'The envelope's addressed to me.'

'I saw the lawyer's name on the flap and recognized it and so I opened it.' And, as if Edward's silence had been a rebuke, 'I've a

perfect right to, you know. Not only a moral right, in fact a duty, but a perfect *legal* right.'

Edward read the letter while eating the hard, greasy potato chips with his fingers. He said, 'It doesn't say anything about me having to be twenty-one. It says I can call and sign the papers and receive the cheque any time after the end of the month.'

'Your grandpa certainly didn't intend you to have the use of it at your age.'

'It doesn't say anything about that here.'

Edward felt himself being firm and cool, and thought of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, because he had played the part on speech-day in his last term at school. He 'could not find it in the bond'. His father crossed the room to stand with his back to the kitchen range, which was out but still warm. From there, behind Edward's back, he said:

'I've never played the heavy father. It's always been man to man between you and me, Edward.'

Edward thought that this probably came from the kind of book his father read in spite of Maud Olantigh's influence. He did not know how to put a stop to it and had to listen. Mr. Tillotson went on for some time while Edward peeled the foil off the sort of cheese which tastes vaguely of soap. His father came and sat down at the table facing him and said, 'The fact is, I'm a bit short this quarter.'

'I'll give you half.'

'A loan only, of course. I'll return it whenever you want it. Or bank it for you, or buy a few war loan perhaps.'

'No. I'll give you half and keep the other half for myself.'

Edward did this because, looking at his father, he found no trace of love or respect in his heart, and it made him uneasy. He would rather have given the money to his Aunt Sarah at Goudhurst; rather to Mr. Pardoner, even, if he could not keep it all for himself. But no doubt he had to pay for finding his father repulsive and, in his need to ask for the money he had tried to swindle him out of, abject. Edward saw his father struggling to say a simple 'Thank you' and turned away his head. And Mr. Tillotson could not do it; it was more than he could compass. Edward was aware of being on the brink of tears. Mr. Tillotson got up from his chair and said, 'Well, we'll see about that,' and went hastily out of the room.

EDWARD'S second distraction from the boredom of work was Doris. Doris was one of the girls; she was also, until she emerged vividly, obsessingly, like an acute pain which will not be ignored, the incarnation of their combined femaleness. It was impossible, at eighteen, to be among so many young girls and not be disturbed, repelled and attracted. The fact of there being so many of them would in the long run have 'neutralized' them, turned them from a couple of hundred individual females into part of the office furniture; if it had not been for Doris.

When they were provoked by Edward's awkward manner, by the distance fear made him keep, by his muttered greetings when a greeting could not be avoided, and they decided to get at him, they did it in the canteen where they were safe from Mrs. Mills, the overseer. For a time he was driven to get his lunch at the pub which Mr. Pardoner frequented, The Bald-faced Nag. But the meal there cost him at least eightpence more than in the firm's canteen, even if he braved the old waiter's contempt and forewent the half-pint of sour beer and forgot his threepenny tip. Moreover, it was borne in on him that Mr. Pardoner did not like to see him there. The first time he appeared in the shabby dining-room with its dirty damask tablecloths and its smell of cabbage and old cigarette smoke, and on every subsequent occasion, Mr. Pardoner's manner, very different from its candour in the office, was distant and a little sulky: he looked up from his paper, nodded, did not smile, froze Edward away from his table. He had no mind to allow the privacy of his lunch hour to be encroached on. Edward took his attitude as a snub and was hurt; and confused, at first, when his office manner continued open and friendly. Only later did Edward understand that Mr. Pardoner was a man to whom habit, an established routine, was so important that he was upset if it was disturbed, so that company welcome at noon was very unwelcome at one o'clock.

Edward was partly driven by Mr. Pardoner, partly drawn by Doris, back to the canteen. Drawn by Doris, so beautiful, so mysterious and so cruel. There, he was alone at the mercy of the girls. He made no friends, and that, probably, was not because he was unamiable or so much above his company in his own estimation, as because he had an instinct not to involve himself with anyone

who, unlike Mr. Pardoner, was not only at Mendoza's, but of it; anyone who went on the annual treat and joined the sports club and the dramatic society. He had always to console himself for being there with the reassurance that his membership of this community was temporary and provisional and would surely be of brief duration.

The ways in which 'the girls' got at him before Doris took a hand were not elaborate nor bold. They would gather into close bunches, like startled heifers, when he passed, and just stare with a bright light of mockery in their eyes. Or, going one step further, they would whisper together, obviously about him, and then all break suddenly into those hoots and screams of laughter without mirth, an expression of general excitement or sometimes of active hostility, like the barking of a house-dog. Edward should have taken no notice; or become aggressive himself, been easier, more natural with them: they would have been friendly enough. But at eighteen he did not know that the alien can discourage the heaving of half-bricks at his foreignness if he has the courage to demonstrate that it is superficial. It was not only this ignorance which was his enemy: it was obsession with Doris, who had taken no part in tormenting him, and whose name he knew only because he had heard one of the other girls call out to her. He had not even discovered his own condition until one evening at home Maud Olantigh threw down a book she was reading and said, 'I can't read this novel. The heroine's name is Doris. It makes her common.' Edward became extremely angry: he actually yelled at Mrs. Olantigh that it was a stupid thing to say and that anyway Doris was one of the most beautiful names a girl could have, and—though he was not clear what this had to do with it—that it was Greek.

A description of Doris, purged by detachment of those excesses of Edward's admiration which could hardly have found adequate expression in all the sensual images of erotic poetry, would say little more than that she was a strikingly pretty girl with smooth black hair, a well-shaped, full, rather loose mouth, a small-waisted figure and what are often called, vulgarly no doubt but arrestingly, bedroom eyes, which were of that pleasing shape in which the upper curve has a smaller radius than the lower.

Day-dreams of Doris were soon leaving no room for boredom and little for study, while night-dreams destroyed Edward's rest. No doubt he gave himself away, perhaps by staring at her in the great barn of a sorting-room where they both worked, without realizing that he was doing so; by 'mooning' after her; by being, as

the word was, soppy. Whether for this or for some other reason Doris, and not one of those who had been forward in tormenting him, committed an atrocious outrage against his modesty. He was just leaving the canteen, heavy with steak pudding. She came straight up to him at the head of four or five other girls, and caught him by the door. His knees shook to have her so near to him and his mouth became painfully dry. He could not have spoken, but in any case there was no need, for Doris said, 'I know you won't mind us speaking to you, Mr. Tillotson, but would you mind if we asked you a question?'

She spoke what she would have called lah-di-dah, in mocking imitation of Edward's own relatively correct speech—his father had somehow acquired a more or less 'public school' accent which had prevailed in Edward over the semi-cockney of the C.S.B.—. He managed a nod; perhaps he even croaked out a 'yes', or said that he did not mind.

'You read books and study a lot, we know that,' Doris said. 'You must know an awful lot. And we're only ignorant girls. But there's a word and we were wondering what it means and had a bit of an argument about it, like, and we was wondering if you'd be so kind as to tell us what it means.'

Edward tried, for all he was certain of disaster poised over him, to make himself easy. He was still shaking and he even began to feel sick with fear and desire. Mumbling, he said he would be glad to define the word if he knew it.

'That's ever so kind of you. It's a word we saw written up on a wall.' With her widely innocent eyes on Edward's face, she uttered it, sharp and clear. It had the effect of a hard slap in the face. He felt himself turn white and then his face was burning. There were surely tears in his eyes as he turned from the girls and ran down the stairs with their hooting laughter loud behind him. All that afternoon he sat at his desk frigidly controlling every movement, concentrating on keeping his self-possession and on putting out of his mind the two alternating scenes which were using it, the scene of his humiliation, and another, imaginary, offspring of the word she had uttered, not knowing perhaps that in his tribe it was tabu to women, at least at that time; and the fact that it was she who had uttered it, *she*, Doris.

At least the relief which would come with five o'clock when the girls left would be lengthened into a respite by the fact that he had the whole of the next day off: Mr. Pardoner had granted him that, to go to the lawyer's and collect his legacy. He tried to think of that:

he had written to ask for payment in bank-notes. A cheque would have had to go through his father's bank account and Edward would have had difficulty in recovering his share. Yet it was not with relief only that he dwelt on the fact that he would not have to face Doris the next day. He was, although he did not recognize the condition, passionately in love with her. Sentimental love is a chronic state at eighteen; uneasy and generalized desire, another. Social customs too frequently ensure that she who becomes the object of the second is not the object of the first. But there was no such ambivalence in Edward's case, and a strange truth forced its way into his resisting mind: that there had been pleasure mingled with the pain of his humiliation at Doris's hands; and that the word she had atrociously asked him to define had the sound of a challenge and was, despite its base currency, in the language of some part of his feelings.

* * *

Edward collected his legacy the next day and took a bus from the solicitor's office to Highfield Pavement, a sort of small fossilized village embedded between the limbo of old, decaying suburb about Brougham Square, which marched with *terra cognita* at the latitude of King's Cross, and Overbury Park South. He went to 'the Pavement' as the natives called it, to pay his father's half of the legacy into the bank—there was a branch there but none at Overbury Park itself—and from there he walked through the grey desolation of late Victorian streets rapidly falling into slumhood which was Overbury Park South. He crossed the eight railway tracks of the King's Cross-Anglesey lines by the old iron footbridge, into Overbury Park North, his own calf country, and skirted what remained of the park proper. His way included a short street one side of which was the iron railing of the park; he could see the chalet-like hut where the kangaroo had lived in one side and the emu in the other, ignoring each other, neither having the air of mitigating the other's loneliness. He supposed the creatures long since dead, and remembered days when his mother took him there and sat on a bench reading *Le Matin* while he ran about, usually alone, but occasionally playing with a little girl whose name, if he had ever known it, he had forgotten. Her mother brought her there; Edward remembered her as a bright-faced yet somehow shrunken woman in shabby clothes and with a way, which he clearly recalled, of raising her hand and moving it in a gesture of emphasis before her face, as if pushing a cobweb away.

At the end of that street was the Overbury Park Motor Mart, a whole street of second-hand motor-car dealers which looked like

a long, narrow breaker's yard, not because the cars were any worse than others of their kind, but because the parking places were the front gardens of tall, late Victorian houses whose basements had become lumber rooms full of old and new tyres and the spare parts of a hundred diverse 'models'; and whose first and second floors, and even attics, were offices of that permanently provisional kind which seems to be peculiar to the motor-car and aircraft trades. They were occupied by the dealers themselves and by such auxiliaries as small and questionable hire-purchase companies and the agencies of 'non-tariff' insurance houses.

This street had always attracted Edward by its strangeness: '... they say the Morris and the Austin keep the Courts where once ...' Some of the front gardens had been cleared of railings, party-fences and shrubs, and covered with concrete to serve their new purpose. Others, in the hands of firms less able to afford such luxuries, retained odd bits of fence or clumps of laurel on which, in autumn, still appeared the bright red oval berries, gracefully decorating the bent mudguards or torn fabric of old, still serviceable motor-cars. There were even some trees left, two tall, gaunt elms, and, half-dead below, still green and hideously bristling above, a single auracaria, a monkey-puzzle tree, towering absurdly above a huddled collection of third- and fourth-hand sports cars.

Edward loitered down the street, looking at the cars, and, no doubt because he had money in his pocket, noting, for the first time, the prices daubed in whitewash across their windscreens. It was a dead time of day, for the car mart did its business between six and darkness in summer and in winter on Saturdays and Sundays. There were no salesmen standing, sharp-eyed as brothel touts in the degraded cities of Islam, to pounce on any loiterer who might perhaps be made to lust after the unfashionable lines and dulled metal of their goods. But when Edward halted to admire an old Sunbeam tourer whose still elegant lines proved its designer to have been something more than an engineer, a young man with his hair set by cream into a blonde skullcap, and with a colossal woollen scarf in some school or club colours wound round his neck, shot out from behind the car and said, 'Like her? Beautifully clean, and as frisky as ever even if she is a bit long in the tooth.'

'Yes,' Edward said, and, 'I'm afraid I'm not a buyer.'

'Never know till you try. Besides, you can't call it buying, really, not this one. Giving her away with a pound of tea at forty quid. No sense in the prices in our trade. The old Sunbeam's twice as good as

anything in the street up to ten years younger. Cars are like women, all the better for a bit of experience. This job was forged and turned on a lathe, not stamped out of tin like a German toy engine.'

Edward liked the salesman at once. He began to see merits in the old Sunbeam which it took this keen critic to reveal. The salesman raised the bonnet and began pointing things out, 'Coil *and* magneto, see? I tell you, they were thorough when they built this job. Not like the rubbish they make now, though I shouldn't say it, crying stinking fish, eh? Forty quid. It's murder, old man, murder.'

'I can't even drive,' Edward said.

'Was a time when you couldn't walk, old man, but you didn't let it beat you. Buy her and I'll teach you to drive. No charge.'

'Seriously?'

'Why not? Creating a new customer for the trade. At our age, you can learn in a couple of hours. And you'll've got a bargain.'

Edward smiled at him and he winked; it was true that he was not much older than Edward, who said, 'When?'

'No time like the present as the sailor said. Got an hour to spare?'

'Yes, but I haven't the money on me,' Edward lied.

'You've got it somewhere, bank, stocking or post-office, it's all the same to Ernie Topper, that's me, if he gets his hands on it in due course. Come to that, old man, you won't be taking her away today. Pay when you do.'

It was because he wanted to keep an escape open that Edward had lied about the money. Tomorrow might change his mind. But at the end of an hour's lesson there was no question of that. To have so much power in his hands was delight; and new. He was quick to learn.

'You're good,' Ernie said, 'and you'll be very good. See you at Brooklands yet, busting records I shouldn't wonder. The thing about a car,' he went on, suddenly the philosopher, 'is the way it gives you freedom. Puts the world at your feet as they say.'

Edward did not know that this was untrue; and after all it was a mistake all but the greatest of men were making at the time and had been for a century. Ernie was an enthusiast; he was even a poet for whom life was motion. He imposed his opinion because he felt it. No philosopher can do more.

Edward had another lesson, and bought a licence on Saturday. On Sunday he and Ernie drove to Folkestone in the first January fog and when they returned that evening Ernie said that Edward could

take the car away on Monday. 'Fifty-two quid with the licence and third-party cover. See you tomorrow night?'

'Right you are, Ernie.'

* * *

On Monday evening it was dark when Edward left Mendoza's great barrack and stepped out into the street. It was a clear darkness and for the first time that winter the air did not cling to his skin like the cold water of a suicide's plunge, but was dry and buoyant: a small pleasure, but he was smiling as he walked towards the bus-stop. There was a girl standing under the first street-lamp from the staff entrance but he did not even glance at her, for there were usually one or two girls hanging about, waiting for a man to leave work. He was going over in his mind the scene of breaking the news about the car to his father. Not that he had anything to be afraid of: he had bought acquiescence in anything he might do for a month or two, paying half his fortune. As he reached the street-lamp the waiting girl stepped out and fell in beside him and, startled, Edward looked at her. It was Doris, and, 'You look happy for once,' she said.

Edward's face was saved by the brief penumbra midway between her lamp and the next one, but despite the kindly darkness he found nothing to say and she went on, 'Here, I waited to say I was sorry. I wouldn't never have done it but how was I to know you'd be that upset?'

You don't know much at eighteen, though what you know is more important than anything you learn afterwards. Edward attributed this handsome behaviour to the sweet nature that most marvellously—yet surely what he had known all the time?—went with her lovely face. In a voice starting deep and ending shrill he said, 'That's all right.'

They passed into the bright region of another street-lamp and he turned his head to look at her and she turned hers to look at him. He felt himself blush. They both smiled. Edward said, 'Look, you surely didn't wait all that time just to . . .'

'What if I did? What's your first name?'

'Edward. Yours is Doris.'

'Fancy you knowing! You going home now?'

'Not directly. Are you?'

'It don't matter. I do what I like, see.'

'I'm going to buy a car.'

'Get on! Pull the other one, mate!'

'No, really. It's all arranged.'

'Coo. Here, take me with you.'

'Why not? Where d'you live?'

'Me? 'Olloway.'

'I live in Overbury Park. I could take you home when we get the car. We could go out to tea first.'

They did not talk on the bus. From time to time Edward looked sideways at Doris. The pure profile had extraordinary distinction, a 'breeding' which, when she was silent, he found almost intimidating. It needed the mutilated speech she used, and the coarseness of her mind—naturally it was not so that he thought of it then—to bring her within his reach, to give him his share of advantage. To approach beauty you have to find a flaw in it; those were her obvious flaws, not, of course, seen as such by Edward.

It did not, probably, occur to him to wonder why Doris had made so determined an advance. The Israelites did not wonder where manna came from when they found it in the desert, or feel themselves undeserving of it: they were too hungry by then. Doris broke long silence to say, 'You don't 'ave to do that job at the fact'ry, do you?'

'It's a sort of start. Training, you know.'

'It's what I thought. What with buying a car an' all.'

'It's not much of a car. I mean, it's pretty old.'

'How old are you?'

'Twenty.'

'Get on! You ain't no twenty.'

'Well, nearly, nineteen actually.'

'So'm I.'

The car was ready for him. He went into the house with Ernie to pay over the money and get a receipt. When they came out Doris was sitting in the passenger seat. Ernie winked at Edward and jerked a cocked thumb. Edward did not mind; he liked it. Getting into the driving seat he told Doris he was sorry there was no rug. He was: he wanted to wrap her up warm.

'You're a scream!' she said, and, 'Fancy me!'

* * *

Having a motor-car changed the atmosphere and the values of Edward's life. 'Having a car' comes before 'having Doris' because he might not have had her without it; nor, if the word be given its vulgar meaning, did he, in fact, 'have' Doris. Without the car, the only outcome of her wait for him under the street-lamp that evening would have been to shake him out of that protective reserve into which she had shocked him and in which he was of no more use to

her than a stubbornly resistant prisoner to a police inquisitor who has made the mistake of starting his questioning with the arc-light and rubber truncheon instead of tea and cigarettes. By getting a car, even an old one, Edward became a first-class citizen; he bore the symbol of the instruments of power. At the factory the girls' teasing became good-natured and flattering; because although he had not touched her he was Doris's love *en titre*, at least in the Brougham Square sector of her compartmented life; and as such he was of interest to her cronies.

He did not at once try to make love to her, in the first place because he did not know how to set about it, but also because now that it had become possible, now that she had ceased to be something he could not get and therefore wanted obsessively, it was not quite so important. As to not knowing how to set about it, the fact was that they were foreigners to each other: the customs of her tribe were unknown to him. This should not have mattered because it seemed clear that she belonged to the class of girls in which, hunting in couples through certain streets in Overbury Park, Finsbury Park and even as far away as Holloway, the more emancipated C.S.B. sixth-formers had sought and found their 'pick-ups'. None of the parties to such encounters ever thought in terms of 'love'; the game was for what some, borrowing an army term, called facetiously slap-and-tickle. The word 'necking' will not do; it has the wrong social implications. At all events the hurried and uncomfortable embraces, stopping short in all but the most exceptional cases at mutual masturbation, were their equivalent to the French *collègien's* first visit to a brothel; it is well known that compromise is the English virtue.

But with Doris and Edward the matter was not so simple. She was raised out of the slap-and-tickle class as far as he was concerned by the quality of her beauty, which seemed to him to impose not a particular rule on himself only, but a general rule on everyone who approached her. It did nothing of the kind, of course; it was simply that he had made the mistake of approaching her first by way of the imagination. But it is true that her beauty was, objectively, of an unusual kind. There might be very pretty girls among those who were nightly and willingly hunted by prowling youth in the dismal streets tributary to the Seven Sisters Road; but their prettiness was reassuringly common. And although *common* be a relative term, so that a person of the upper classes would probably not have been able to distinguish any difference between the general appearance and manners of the working-class girls and the lower middle-class

youths who applied it to them, yet it did signify a real though perhaps subtle difference which gave the youths a reassuring sense of class superiority. It established, as it were, a measure of exogamy in these short relationships, one of the advantages of which is that the man, out of his own tribe, can with good conscience shed his tabus. You could not put your hand up the skirts of your sister's friends. But with the prowling skivvies and factory girls it was all right to try anything.

But because in Edward's eyes there was nothing common about Doris's kind of beauty, it unclassed her; it elevated her to the sister's-friend class. It is true that the ugliness of her speech and the coarse commonplaces which her mind produced, the roughness of her hands and the dirt under her painted finger-nails, should have set her back in the class of girl with whom no holds were barred. But Edward was in love with Doris, and as that is a subjective condition it did not matter what she was; all that mattered was what he made of her. Doris became a sort of human Christmas-tree on which he hung all sorts of fanciful decorations made out of literature.

So that he did not hear Doris's voice or see her hands as flaws; but nor, with the simple and eager optimism of C.S.B., did he see them as a sign that there would be 'something doing'. They were not subtracted from what the pure and refined beauty of her profile in repose amounted to, but on the contrary added to it; they became pathetic, almost tear-jerking evidence of the hardness of her lot, thus enhancing all her other qualities. And a girl who had had all Doris's beauty and animation and at the same time clean finger-nails, correct speech and interesting thoughts would not have been more attractive to him but less attractive; in fact altogether neutral and uninteresting.

And Edward, who must have seemed insipid as a lover to a girl accustomed to the more robust approach of her Holloway slum, was given an unexpected hold over her by what, to her, was strange in his approach, by the sentimentality, which she must have called soppieness but been flattered by, of the things he said and even wrote to her; and by his hesitation, during the first few weeks, to go beyond holding her hand when they drove rather aimlessly about in the Sunbeam and stopped in some dark, semi-rural lane where the suburban sprawl began to peter out into Hertfordshire pastures, the purpose of which halts being, ostensibly, 'to smoke a cigarette'. (Later, when Edward read Proust under Celia Woodreeve's influence, he recognized their 'to smoke a cigarette' as Swann and Odette's *faire catleya*.)

Perhaps, in pre-cinema times, Edward's conduct would not have

been received by Doris as flattering and touching, and as tending to elevate her into the class her face entitled her to. It is difficult to make this point with sufficient emphasis, the point of the quality, not the bare fact, of Doris's beauty, because not only is beauty to some extent a matter of fashion, but in this, as in other attributes, there has been a rapid proletarianization of standards during the quarter of a century here in question. In twenty-five years of swift social change, quality in beauty like quality in goods has been levelled down. It has, in fact, become very much a matter of hypertrophied secondary sexual characteristics, representing a return to primitive standards which goes very logically with the shedding of elaborate manners. But the change has been as recent as that in, for example, the fabrics from which clothes are made.

Without the motor-car, then, Edward's love would have been ridiculous to Doris, and even more impotent than it long remained. Not that Doris was crudely calculating, and kind to him only because it was convenient to have a vehicle at her disposal and a young man with a little more money than one of her own class would then have had. (Edward did not earn more; but he was not made to pay anything at home.) But no doubt the car made him more interesting and powerful as, in a higher class, a fortune or an old title would have done. Labruyère said, 'It is but a sad business to be in love without a large fortune.' The Sunbeam was Edward's large fortune.

But although this could and did make Doris go through the motions of a sweetheart, it also ensured his discontent, in fact his misery, a misery which did not, indeed, last very long but was none the less acute. For she did no more than go through the motions; and though she took her own pleasure in doing so, it was in a state of emotional neutrality: her body only was involved, and there was never any question of her responding with love. In short, she was by nature a 'light' woman. And when Edward showed his discontent, pestered her to say she loved him, and showed that he longed for her to be as much alone with him as he with her in the midst of their fellow-workers at Mendoza's, that their love cut them off from the rest and put a fence round the isolated pair they were in his imagination, she became impatient and, since these demands were usually manifested after a kissing and holding session, she would say, 'What more do you want?'

What more he wanted was to see her made singular, her old loyalties entirely broken by love; to be able to look across the room to the long table where she worked and see at a glance that, seated

among hundreds, she was divorced from them, absent, all the time with him, not them. Whereas she was as much the life and soul of her clique of giggling, shrill-voiced, often foul-mouthed friends as she had ever been, and as ready to join in their secret, elaborate, only half articulate mockery of Edward as ever, if not in that open teasing—Mr. Pardoner's 'chi-iking'—which, indeed, she more or less put a stop to.

The car made a difference at home, too. The way Edward first announced his possession of it was to drive up to the house, go in, and say to his father and Maud who were idling after Sunday dinner, 'Come and see what I've got!'

It was said with a sort of worked-up high spirits, an unsuitable 'mischievousness' which, even in his own shrinking ears, sounded spuriously arch. But they came out with him, Maud Olantigh giving an elaborate shiver of distaste at the contact of the raw January air after the fug of the close sitting-room with its heavy plush curtains on their massive mahogany rod, the thick old Turkey carpet, the big coal fire, the standard lamp with its crimson shade switched on at three in the afternoon because that room was so dark. It was a late Victorian interior, inherited with the house and never changed because there was no money for what Maud called gracious living—the words were not yet funny—and it was perfectly serviceable.

Mr. Tillotson examined the Sunbeam and listened to his son's explanation in silence. He had been more or less asleep when, with about as much real spontaneity as an elderly professional *jeune premier* Edward had burst in on them, youth rousing stuffy middle-age from sloth. His face was puffy and his hair untidy. When Edward could find no more to say and Mr. Tillotson still continued sulkily silent, Maud, conscientiously on the side of youth, said, 'I'm sure it was a great bargain, Edward. If I put my best hat on so as not to disgrace you, will you take me for a drive one day?'

'Delighted, I'm sure,' Edward said, in cockney.

His father spoke; or rather, to use some weightier word called for by his manner, gave utterance, at last, 'I've never come the heavy father. It is no business of mine what you do with your own money. I should have thought it would have been wiser . . . however, heaven forbid that I should spoil your pleasure in this toy, if it's the sort of thing you want from life.' That was all; the hundred pounds Edward had given him had been an excellent investment: it created an equilibrium, almost a tension, between them which, considered by Edward in mathematical terms, was a thing of poised beauty. At

every crisis, when Mr. Tillotson's exasperation at Edward's increasingly bold assumptions of freedom rose to a peak, his son could, by a look, imply that he was on the very point of asking for his money back. There would follow a pause, a silence during which the two forces, Mr. Tillotson's threat of anger and Edward's of financial pressure, trained against each other and then, neutralizing each other, sank again into flatness. The wave was past, the crisis over.

Mr. Pardoner, although he must have known, did not at first make even the remotest circumlocutory allusion to Edward being in love with Doris. His attention must have been called to it by the younger man's fits of bad-tempered absence: all day long Edward could watch Doris at her work across the room and, deliberately, she never looked his way. And although this discretion was, in the circumstances, sensible, he would brood on it until it became of a piece with the fact that she would allow him no nearer to the house where her parents lived (they occupied one floor only, the rest being sublet to lodgers), than the end of her road; and that she would not talk about her past at all. It was not less, but more unpleasant to be jealous of what he did not know and had to imagine, of a whole family circle, of young men who had been brought up with her, with whom she had played in the streets, who had nicknames for her, who naturally spoke the native tongue of the Holloway slums, a language whose subtler meanings, allusions, historical associations and social undertones were as unknown to him as if it had been Chinese. These jealous pains, if not as atrocious, were at least as absorbing as a severe toothache; and made Edward's conduct as unsatisfactory, from Mr. Pardoner's point of view, as toothache would have done.

And he made a curious discovery about himself: he distrusted the condition (the antithesis of boredom), of being utterly absorbed in another person, distrusted 'love', regretted his lost emotional freedom in which anything was possible but one remained at one's own disposal. His self, his I, was being eroded, and he resented it. With so much to occupy his heart and mind it might have been supposed that he would neglect the voluntary work which Mr. Pardoner's concern with his idleness had suggested to him. Nothing of the sort; he flew to it with more eagerness than he had gone to it in his flight from boredom. He applied himself to it with a sense of urgency which he did not really understand, unless it was that, just as Doris cast a new, brighter, more poignant light for him upon physical objects, so that the dusty crocuses of Overbury Park front gardens, the tender green of horse-chestnut burgeonings, the manifold browns

and buffs of the sparrows which fought and twittered in the gutters, were very brilliant for him that early spring, so, too, the excellent if simple truths of physics which he found in Abrams, in Simmonds and in Pardoner on Alternating Currents, assumed an elegance which he had not been conscious of before, and became exciting clues to be followed towards a conclusion still hidden but of enormous promise. At all events he made far more rapid progress than before. And not only in 'his' subjects; he found himself cutting down his sleep to six hours and suffering no inconvenience, and reading voraciously, as if his mind had become morbidly hungry. He read all Maud Olantigh's books, but especially those which she kept on her shelves in much the same spirit as those Catholics who do no more than their Easter duty in the course of a year, but who have an image of Our Lady, or a Crucifix, somewhere on the walls of their room. These, in short, were the books which were there to reassure her that she was what she conceived herself to be, a woman of culture. But she did not, and perhaps could not, actually read them; her mind had once, no doubt, been capable of enjoying them but it had shrunk with the nature of her work; and, perhaps, because she was deeply (to Edward, inexplicably) attached to Mr. Tillotson, she hid from herself a taste which must entail contempt for his utter want of it.

Edward read her George Eliots, her Jane Austens, her Balzacs and Anatole Frances, her Thackerays, Tolstoys and Dostoevskys. And other books, whose presence on those shelves was due to some accidental acquisition: with his C.S.B. German, on which he had been able to concentrate at school because French being his first language he never had to learn it, and a dictionary, he, improbably, made a good deal of his way through Musil's *Der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften* before anyone in England had ever heard of it. He read Prescott's *Conquest of Peru*, Mommsen, a seventeenth-century translation of the *Phaedo*, and a thick anthology of the metaphysical poets. As well as these classics, Mrs. Olantigh was always acquiring, a year behind time, the fashionable novels: thus, Edward read Dreiser and Aldous Huxley; but also such now forgotten successes as Carl van Vechten and J-R. Bloch.

Absurdly, he talked to Doris about what he read; it was a monologue offered up to her, a hymn to the goddess, the best he had and therefore hers. Each such monologue ended only when, bored beyond what she was prepared to tolerate, she would say, 'You and your books! For Chrissakes give over.' For the world of ideas was quite

closed to her. He did not criticize Doris for this failing, even in his heart; to him it was not a failing; Doris was of his own making, and he was able to see her complete absence from this world of ideas as, if not deliberate, at least 'instinctive', a wholesome rejection of all but the concrete. The only thing approximating to an art which they could enjoy together was the cinema. They went twice, even three times a week. Doris enjoyed the pictures, although in a very passive way, rather as a cow may be supposed to enjoy a good sit-down-and-chew, so that these spectacles did not really provide them with anything to talk about. Edward might have something to say about the story or the beauty of the photography, or the acting: Doris never did. She laughed, in a way which might be described as cruel, for it was quite without the quality of innocent enjoyment, at broad farce: Laurel and Hardy, two knock-about comedians, were favourites. But nothing else seemed to move her. She and Edward sat close together with his arm round her waist and her head on his shoulder. By this attitude she committed her body, but no more, to Edward's increasing unhappiness which, curiously, was felt as a loss, as if he had known her before and she had been different then. After the pictures her only comment would be, 'Isn't she (less often, he) lovely?' naming a star. And that, no doubt, rather than a story she was perhaps not always able to follow, was what she enjoyed: watching a human being who excelled in, and was often depicted as exploiting, what, because it was her own excellence, she could understand: beauty of person.

Sometimes they went for a drive but Doris was listless away from town. Driving home, whether from the pictures or the country (the un-built-on bits of Hertfordshire beyond Whetstone), Edward always stopped in the same unfrequented side-road which led through a still self-respecting quarter into her own semi-slum, and they had their fifteen or twenty minutes of holding tight and kissing. Here, too, Doris was Edward's own creation: had he started the association not romantically but, as any youth not in love with her would have done, lustfully, he could have gone, as they said at C.S.B., the 'whole hog'. But by his own conduct he had driven her to value her favours at a new level; her currency, if only for him, had hardened. So that if his caresses succeeded in exciting her, she would check him at once and he, instantly ashamed because *this* was not at all the attitude he had been striking, never persisted. Nor, oddly enough, was this so very much of a trial to him: it is so much easier to live by rules, even when they take the form of restraints,

than to live in freedom. By custom their affair had stabilized itself at a certain level of licence, and custom was comforting as it always is. There was another factor: funk. Edward wanted to 'go the whole hog' in the same way that a swimmer wants to plunge into the sea on a cold day. It is a thing he knows he will enjoy; it is also a kind of obligation, something he owes it to himself to do. But he may not be too terribly disappointed if the beach-guards hoist the red flag of danger forbidding him to carry out his purpose.

Edward's romantic behaviour may not have been the only influence in giving Doris a more respectable standard of conduct. She might not seem to him to take in what she saw at the pictures, yet no doubt they had a sort of subliminal influence, they were teaching her not to hold herself too cheap as a marketable commodity, for that was their lesson to young women. Beauty, she was learning, was a commercial as well as a social asset. The triumph of the Pin-up, the apotheosis of the Starlet, were being prepared. Doris was being drawn into the stream.

* * *

One morning, after Edward had known Doris for at least a year, he had to go to the dentist and with Mr. Pardoner's permission he arrived late for work, at about ten o'clock. He put the Sunbeam into the yard which was used as a car-park by directors and managers, between two blocks of the factory. A huge, open Mercedes-Benz with fat and shining external exhaust pipes, was being parked at the same time. The young man at the wheel was David Mendoza, whom Edward knew by sight. He was quicker than Edward and walked past him as he was getting out of the Sunbeam. He hesitated, halted, nodded at the Sunbeam and said, 'I must say I like your car.'

'It's what I could afford,' Edward said, sulkily, although there had been nothing patronizing in Mendoza's praise. Mendoza looked quickly at Edward's face and away again and faintly blushed. He was six or seven years older than Edward. Speaking quickly and with a placatory note in his voice, he said, 'You're lucky, then. Oh, I don't mean not being able to afford what you want. But like a collector of . . . of objects of vertu, you know, who hasn't much . . . whose resources are limited, and so he has to develop his eye and taste all the more. More fun, you see. I mean, your Sunbeam's a collector's piece, isn't she?'

'Ought to be in a museum, you mean?'

There was no brave independence in the curtness of Edward's answers, in the rejection of the other's advance, or in the refusal to

call him *sir*. A very pious High Anglican once said that whereas he felt an inner compulsion to treat the bishop with deference, he found a familiarity of address quite natural when praying to God alone, at his *priedieu*, and he thought it was because God must be free from the prejudices, likes, dislikes, which the bishop, as a man, was subject to. David Mendoza was so far above Edward in the social-financial hierarchy that Edward felt no need to parade respect: nothing he could do or say could possibly have any effect on so remote a being. But there was more to his behaviour than that: something mean in him which drove him to resist the charm of David Mendoza's simplicity.

'Or do I perhaps mean,' Mendoza picked up Edward's answer with a kind of imploring note in his voice, 'that half the things we put in museums ought to be in use? Don't you always think that a well-designed, well-made article of use is so much better for us than the—well—rather rubbishy stuff we make now?'

'Nothing rubbishy about that,' Edward said, nodding at the Mercedes.

'No, no, of course, I didn't mean . . .' Mendoza blushed again, as if caught out in an attempt at fraud. 'Though as a matter of fact,' he went on eagerly, 'she is giving me trouble. Do you know about engines? I mean, do your own maintenance and repairs?'

'Yes. I can't afford garages. The man who sold me the car has been giving me lessons so that I can be my own mechanic.'

'Well, I wish to goodness you'd have a look at mine. They can't seem to find the trouble.'

David Mendoza's father had two chauffeurs; all the mechanics in London were ready to serve him; it was absurd to ask Edward's help; it was also irresistible. Edward did not even ask himself why the other young man was pressing his friendship on him. There was, in David's charm, a predominance of nature which showed through his rather clumsy arts and which, setting all question aside, imposed itself. His was, in a measure, the friendliness of a nice dog; it was an appeal; he wanted to be liked, to have none of the enemies which economic and social laws must constantly be making him. That he had an ulterior motive Edward did not know until later; and had he known, it would not have led him to dismiss David's friendliness as some kind of humbug, because it so manifestly was nothing of the kind. Edward's first reaction to David's appeal had been hostility; it broke down under the influence of David's humility.

'I can try,' Edward said.

'Oh, good! This evening?'

'If you like.'

'Which department do you work in?'

'Gifts.'

'With Mr. Pardoner?'

'Yes.'

'You're lucky.'

'In working for him? Yes.'

'But you don't like the work?'

They were walking up the stairs side by side, for maintenance men were working on the lift. Edward saw the commissionaire stare, and imagined his stock rising like a rocket. He was pleased, and understood the feelings of the man who, according to a story Reuben Lipschitz had once told his father and which Mr. Tillotson had been retailing ever since, went to a Rothschild for help and got it in the form of a walk down Lombard Street arm-in-arm with the great financier.

'Would *you* like it?' he said to Mendoza's question.

Mendoza frowned and looked at him sharply and away again in the quick, almost birdlike way he had. Edward said, hastily, 'It does for a start,' and, as they reached his floor, tempted by the other's sympathy, which was almost a kind of empathy, 'I'm going to try and be an electrical engineer; I'm reading the maths of the subject at the moment.'

'But that's most interesting and exciting for you. Look, if you really will be so kind as to have a look at my motor-car, I'll pick you up in your department this afternoon and we can take the car out on trial.'

'All right.'

As Edward turned towards the lift, which, after a lot of hollow shouting up and down the shaft, was working again, he saw Mr. Pardoner come out of another office at the far end of the corridor. He was at the lift first and kept it waiting for him, and, as Edward closed the gates on them, said:

'You move in exalted circles, Tillotson.'

'He admired my car.'

'Ah. And what did you "make of" him?'

'Seems all right.'

'Is that all?'

'No, it's not,' Edward said, annoyed by Mr. Pardoner's ironical tone, 'he seems a jolly decent chap.'

'I believe that, in the sense you doubtless give that rather general description, he is so. Full of charm, isn't he? And no man has a right to be so good-looking. They're a remarkable family. The old man . . .'

'I've never even seen him.'

'No, we rarely do. He has his private lift at the back of the building. He looks like an El Greco, white beard and prayerful eyes and a long thin face . . .'

'El Greco was a painter, wasn't he?'

'Ruskin, thou should'st be living at this hour! Yes, he was a painter with astigmatic hypermetropia which enabled him to get a great deal of spirituality into the faces he painted. That is one theory. The other is that he had strong religious feelings. At all events, old Isaac looks like one of his Christs, a fact which has been, perhaps, his greatest asset. People tend to treat him as if he were a rather saintly clergyman. Afterwards they find out that they were mistaken.'

'You mean he's unscrupulous?'

'But no more than it pays to be. If you seek his monument, look about you; and then ask yourself how a scrupulous man could have done it.'

'Well, that's just business, isn't it?' Edward said.

'Oh, quite.'

They got out of the lift and walked towards the double doors into their own department, while Mr. Pardoner went on, 'There's another side to him: pride in his Sephardi ancestry. I sat next to him at the firm's annual dinner once, the only one of its functions I am unable to avoid, and he was quite forthcoming, although less so than his son. He talked about his origins in old Granada. Or it may have been old Cordoba. I know it was old and ended in A. He did not go so far as to claim that his people had been Saracen paladins, but one got that impression.'

Edward had a feeling that Mr. Pardoner was talking just to keep him engaged right into his office, to carry him, without actually sending for him, past his own desk. There, he broke off abruptly and looked at Edward and said, 'Rather odd, young Mendoza's attitude, Tillotson. That almost importunate friendliness to a . . . forgive me . . . very junior and obscure member of his staff . . .'

Edward did not see how Mr. Pardoner could have deduced Mendoza's attitude from the little he had told him. He said, 'Un-usual. But I don't think it was odd. It was, somehow, natural.'

Mr. Pardoner looked at him in silence, his face carefully expressionless. He said, 'Well, it's no business of mine I suppose,' and then, abruptly, having never so much as hinted that he had noticed his assistant's infatuation with the girl Doris, he smiled, almost shyly, not perfectly sure of himself, and said, 'How are you "making out" with that young woman out there?'

Edward blushed hotly and said, 'What young woman?'

'My dear Tillotson, I am not blind nor in my dotage. The question was a benevolent one, I assure you. Gather your roses, Tillotson, gather them now. Good, wholesome, sweet-smelling roses never did anyone under thirty any harm. Until you are thirty, Tillotson, the body is an amusing toy. After that it should be either ignored or disciplined, or it will become a serious nuisance. Attempts to go on treating it as a toy—elderly men playing ball games and seeking sexual excitement—are the abomination of desolation. I preach indulgence to sensuality in youth, severity towards it thereafter. Men over forty turning their attention from their proper business, which is to learn how to die with credit, and stirring up the heyday in the blood which should be waiting upon reason, would be fewer and less offensive if more roses were gathered in youth. All right, go back to your work and forget these ramblings.'

Edward was not surprised at the enigmatic quality in some of Mr. Pardoner's remarks because he put a false construction on them. He had, almost as a matter of principle, an attitude of resistance to their employers, and perhaps to all men in authority. He accepted their terms under protest, as it were. He once said to Edward, 'Men, Tillotson, not God, are to blame for everything.'

It was a generalization called forth by some catastrophic news or other. He might smile with the consciousness that he was being rather tiresomely whimsical when he attributed persistent bad weather to the National government: all the same, when he pointed to 'the really rather hen-like countenance of the Prime Minister', beaming 'fatuously and despite his own bungling' from the picture page of a newspaper, and demanded, concerning the wetness of May or the coldness of June, 'What can you expect, Tillotson, with such a fellow as this at the head of the nation's business?' Edward used to feel that, in his heart, he believed there must be a connection; perhaps Mr. Pardoner thought that God was punishing a wilfully foolish electorate? Unwilling to admit that by putting his political emotions before his duty as a Naval Officer, he had accepted self-immolation; unwilling to blame his own weakness, his own blunder-

ing into marriage with a silly, ill-tempered woman who was perhaps only silly and ill-tempered because he had made her so by his contempt, and into fatherhood, blunders which had, he claimed, put a stop to his musical work; unwilling, too, to put the blame on to that unsatisfactorily faceless but implacable force called *Them*, he had come to lay it on a sort of personal Big Brother composed of all governing, owning, directing men.

So that, as Edward thought, Edward's hobnobbing with David Mendoza had offended him as a kind of treachery. Perhaps, in his first sullen answers to Mendoza's advances, Edward had even felt this himself, had remembered that Mr. Pardoner often referred to the young man ironically as the 'Heir Apparent'. Yet how much satisfaction liberals of Mr. Pardoner's kind most admirably deny themselves! Another man would have purged his spleen by calling Mendoza a Yid with the accent which implies abusive adjectives—*dirty, little*—and so had done with it. Or he would have abused Edward's new friend in terms other than racial without even that loss of face in his own eyes which falling into step with the German anti-Semites would have entailed. But that was something Edward did not know then; he did not know that David Mendoza had provided all good men with a stout and unbreakable rod for his own slender back.

In the canteen at lunch-time Edward said to Doris, 'Look, I'm going to be late this evening. Can you wait for me?'

'Doin' a bit of overtime?'

He explained and she said, 'Crikey! Him!'

'He's not bad.'

'I daresay, curly-locks!'

'Don't call me that. Will you wait or go home alone?'

'You need looking after. Still, I'm not hanging about for anyone. See you tomorrow if you've got time.'

Edward regretted the arrangement; he went after her and said, 'I'll tell him I can't come.'

'Don't be so soft. Might be worth a rise I shouldn't wonder.'

It was only three in the afternoon when David Mendoza came down the long room to Mr. Pardoner's office. He paused for a moment at Edward's desk, his fingers touching it, and said, 'I'll just make our excuses to your chief,' and went into the office. Edward heard him say to Mr. Pardoner, 'Could I possibly borrow young Tillotson for a couple of hours?' But he missed Mendoza's explanation as the door shut behind him and as his own attention was caught by Doris's antics. Mrs. Mills being in the far corner and with her

back turned, supervising the tea-making by the week's tea-orderlies, Doris got up from her place and walked, swaying her hips and wriggling her shoulders, the length of the room, in an exaggerated parade of female display. There were titters and one isolated shriek of laughter. Mrs. Mills turned round and Doris, assuming a normal walk, made for the ladies' lavatory. Her performance amused Edward without meaning any more than the mockery of his own speech which she still, from time to time, could not resist indulging in by talking lah-di-dah.

Mendoza came out of Mr. Pardoner's office and said, 'I've begged you off.' There were more titters as they went down the room together. Edward glanced at his companion and saw his face flushed under the olive skin, and sullen. 'Awful little bitches!' Mendoza said; and, hastily, 'One can't blame them, of course. Dreadful background. Most of them come from really shocking homes. A few of us, friends of mine, started a boys' club after we'd heard a talk by Basil Henriques—you know about his work?' Edward shook his head. 'Oh, well, you should, I'll tell you about it later. We started this club in Kentish Town, so I know what I'm talking about, these girls come from the same kind of homes. And we don't pay them enough.'

'I see.'

They got into the lift: Mendoza looked at Edward and said, 'You sound very non-committal, Mr. Tillotson. I say, *Mister* sounds absurd; and just Tillotson, forbiddingly schoolmasterly. Suppose I were to call you Edward?'

'It's my name.'

'Edward, then. Would your feelings for what is fitting be *froissé*—there was a slight waspishness in his way of saying that—'by calling me David?'

'I don't think so.'

'Good. Then we have our concordat. As to what we were saying, I suppose you think I should do something about it.'

'About what?'

'Paying those girls a decent wage.'

'I imagine their union looks after that.'

'Dear me! You sound as stony-hearted as my father. They haven't a union, poor dears. And I haven't much influence on the Board, where I am a voice crying in the wilderness. Don't you ever talk to them?'

'The girls?' Edward could not prevent himself from blushing. He said, 'Some of them. Sometimes.'

'Are there any pretty ones?'

There was, in Mendoza's manner of questioning him, a faint, a very faint echo of Mr. Tillotson's ill-restrained, offensive eagerness in hinting at his son's undesirable habits of a few years ago, which Edward did not at once recognize but which may have accounted for the distaste he felt. He said, 'One of them is. What's up with your Merc.?''

'Do you mind if I suggest that you call it a Mercedes, the second E being long and the third short? I don't,' he went on, laughing to take the sting out of this rebuke, 'insist on the Benz. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that there's a regrettably Great Portland Street flavour about the abbreviation, don't you think?'

'Anyway, what's wrong with it?'

By then they were out in the car-park and standing by Mendoza's motor-car. 'It spits,' he said, 'and coughs, and jerks, like an old man with bronchitis. It isn't the carburettors because we dismantled them and reassembled them at least twelve times. You drive.'

He showed Edward the controls. Edward became absorbed, unaware of David Mendoza excepting as a source of information. He was excited and absorbed by the power under his hands. He was fascinated by the difference between this and the power-thrill of riding Mr. Tuff's horse down at Goudhurst. This was a purer, colder pleasure. He turned the car north-west and driving very carefully because he was half afraid of it, worked through side-streets to Camden Town, and on to the Hampstead road and so out to the North Circular Road. There was room to go, there. The rise of power as he accelerated was not interrupted by any such hesitation as David had described: it presented itself to his mind as a smooth exponential curve. He was about to say so, with the speedometer registering eighty-five, when the engine coughed, jerking the whole car, and losing several hundred revolutions.

Driving the big car at such a speed gave him authority, convincing even to himself: since he could do this, he must know things; he must be pretty nearly omniscient; at one hundred miles an hour, he would be. The experience was reminiscent of the way in which he had suddenly and dazzlingly understood, as he jumped Mr. Tuff's horse over his first five-bar gate, why mounted policemen knock pedestrian mobs about. He turned his head slightly towards David and said, 'It's ignition trouble,' and slowed to forty so that they need not shout at each other, while David said, 'We've tried that.'

'I'm sure I'm right,' Edward said, and stopped the car and got

out and opened the bonnet and stared at the engine, peering about without much idea of what he was seeking, until at last he pointed to a rubber-covered cable and said, 'I'll bet the insulation's breaking down there,' thinking, after all, it could be true: the rubber touches the cylinder block and it looks a bit perished. He taped it, David watching his hands with something between admiration and tolerant amusement, and started the car again, and said, 'You drive now, David,' self-consciously aware of using the other's name for the first time.

David's driving revealed a being Edward had not yet begun to know: it was seeing the texture of a fabric brought suddenly close under his eyes. He knew that he was not and never would be in David's 'class' as a driver. There was a degree of nervous connection between David and the machine which Edward would not accomplish in a lifetime. A long straight opened before them, and he felt the car thump him in the back as David engaged the super-charger. Edward watched the speedometer needle quiver over the 100 and remain there for a few moments, then fall steadily until they were crawling at thirty. 'You were right, of course,' David said, and, 'I'm excessively grateful, Edward.' (His adjectives and adverbs had already struck Edward as oddly chosen; *excessively* was one of them.) 'Want to drive again?'

'No, thanks, it will make me fed-up with the Sunbeam.'

They were back at Brougham Square just before five o'clock. David drove into the car-park but did not at once get out of the car, and when Edward moved to do so put his hand on his arm for a moment and said, 'I owe you a terribly nice dinner for this. How about dining with me tonight?'

Edward wanted to get away; the girls would be coming out at any moment and he would be able to drive Doris home after all. The five o'clock siren sounded as he was hesitating. He had his eyes on the door which the girls used and which opened into the yard.

'You mean tonight?' he said, without taking his eyes off that door; it opened and two girls came out talking, followed after a moment by a stream of them, chattering and laughing noisily. Edward got out of the car, resenting his inability to leave David with a nod or a word, and afraid of missing Doris. 'There's a friend I promised to drive home,' he said.

Suddenly icy, David said, 'Very well. Some other evening, then.'

At the same moment Edward saw Doris, alone between two groups. She looked towards the cars, no doubt to see if the Sunbeam

was still there. Edward waved, rather hesitantly, as if he were ashamed to do it in front of David, and turned towards him, distracted between the two of them, and said, hastily, 'All right, yes, I'd like to.'

David's face was white and his fine, hawk's-beak nose pinched. He said, 'Unless, of course, you'd prefer to be paid in cash,' the words coming off the surface of his lips, sharp and thin. Edward was not offended but, albeit strangely even to himself, concerned, as if David had given a cry not of venom but of pain. For a moment he hung there, between Doris, who had gone to the Sunbeam and got into the passenger seat, and David, who still sat at the wheel of his own car. This hesitation must have conciliated David, for he got out as Edward moved towards his car and caught him up and said, 'Tomorrow evening would suit me if it would suit you.'

'Yes, it would,' Edward said, with relief, the more readily in that it was Doris's night to stay at home and wash her hair.

'Then I'll pick you up at five in your own office,' David said, and turned and walked away abruptly.

As Edward got into the Sunbeam beside Doris she said, 'Sticks like a postage stamp, don't he?'

'Wanted to get me to eat with him tonight,' Edward said, and was aware that there was a kind of treachery, the treachery we commit a dozen times a day, the treachery by which the self reminds us that it is a burden to be borne, in the contemptuous tone he used of his new friend, to please Doris. 'I told him I had to take you home.'

'There's no have to about it,' she said, 'we ain't married.'

'Don't be cross, Dorry. It was only a manner of speaking.'

3

DAVID MENDOZA was punctual to his appointment. Mr. Pardoner was standing hatted and coated, ready to leave, at Edward's desk, giving his assistant the first words of praise he had yet vouchsafed in any matter of business; it was for the way he had sorted out a muddle, a customer due for a canteen of cutlery had been sent a Britannia metal teapot intended for another who bore the same name. Mr. Pardoner's praise took a singular form: 'What we have to do for a living is contemptible, Tillotson; but we take money for it.'

Edward saw David hesitate at the sight of Mr. Pardoner talking to him, then square his shoulders and come on again. He began to talk the moment he was within range of them, 'You know, it really is too absurd that our young friend here should have to spend his time messing about with gift coupons when he is clearly a born electrician! Did he tell you how he spotted the fault in my car, just like that . . .' He snapped his fingers. Not until later, recollecting the scene, did Edward 'hear' that it was not the sort of thing a man says meaning just what he says and no more. At the time he took it at its face value and consequently could not account for the embarrassment with which Mr. Pardoner replied, 'I don't know whether one can be born an electrician. It seems improbable. Yet I don't know why, the artist is "born" and the arts are no less artificial than the trades. Or are they? It raises a whole—constellation of points. But I agree with the spirit of your observation, Mr. Mendoza. On the other hand, Tillotson is not alone, surely? Aren't we all in the same case? We all expend our spirit in a waste of shame. Good evening to you.'

Tall, lean, with a forward stoop, he walked away from them down the long room, with an air of being hunched into his overcoat in anticipation of the cold air of the street, although the weather had turned quite mild.

'I shouldn't have said that, it's made him think of his organ music,' David, looking after him, said, as if 'organ music' were a beloved wife recently dead. Edward, who had thought rather that Mr. Pardoner had in mind his own sad case, was taken aback. He said, 'Isn't it people's own fault if they don't do what they want to do?'

'I believe you're a tough, Edward,' David said, and, 'I didn't bring the car.'

'Nor did I.'

'We'll take a taxi.'

He used the telephone on Edward's desk to tell the commissionaire to get them one and to let him know when it arrived, and putting down the receiver said, 'It smells in here. Cheap soap overlying sweat. Let's wait in my office.'

They went down two floors. David's office had a Chinese carpet and a desk, chairs and some kind of sideboard all of which were—as he subsequently told Edward—'Chinese' Chippendale. Apologetically, he said, 'I have to spend so many hours of my life here. I don't see why one shouldn't have things it's pleasant to look at, do you? What will you have, sherry, whisky, gin?'

'Whatever you're having.'

'Oh, good. Let me see, dry vermouth and a dash of gin I think. You know, I meant what I said, it is absurd that you should be wasting your gifts here. I wonder what we can do about it? Well, here's to your still mysterious future.'

He raised his glass; only slightly embarrassed, Edward raised his own. It did not occur to him to wonder what gifts he had and, if he had them, how David knew it. If David found him gifted, he was certainly not going to deny it. The telephone rang: their taxi was at the door.

'Another?'

Prudently, Edward shook his head.

'Right, when we get there, then,' David said, and, holding the door for Edward, 'Do you know the *Flaubert*, where I've booked a table?'

Edward did not; he had not even heard of it. On the rare occasions when, with his father and Maud, he had been to the 'West End', Maud always knew a frightfully good little place in Old Compton Street. Edward had been to several of these. Maud used to say, 'I mean, why spend money just on a name? This place will be discovered soon and the prices will soar and the quality collapse. Let's enjoy it while it's still good.'

The frightfully good little place always looked the same. Italian railway posters on the Lincrusta walls, slightly dirty table-cloths, wine in *fiascos*; and spaghetti served with the veal, as if it were a vegetable. At the time, of course, Edward accepted Maud's valuation: as for his father, he neither knew nor cared what he was eating provided there was a large plate full. He had only one gastronomic 'line' and that had originally, perhaps only tentatively, been one of Maud's. But she, with her usual selflessness where Mr. Tillotson was concerned, dropped it at once when he adopted it, leaving it to him. 'It's a pity,' he would say, 'that none of these little places, excellent though they are, serve a proper pudding.'

Maud: 'They do a very good zabaglione here.'

Mr. Tillotson: 'Zabaglione is not pudding. I have nothing against it, it is very good in its place, but it is not pudding. Of course, the only people who understand pudding are the English. I grant you that the rest of our *cuisine* is shocking, but we do make a good jam-roll or rolypoly, or spotted dog, the good old Royal Navy plum-duff you know.'

This would not have done had the Tillotsons moved in strictly *bourgeois* circles. It would have been taken at its face value for a

manifestation of the Englishman abroad's bacon-and-eggs-for-breakfast spirit which it was smart to consider ridiculous. But as Mr. Tillotson's circle, in so far as he had one, was made of the very people who struck the attitude that gastronomic insularity was ridiculous, not realizing that they shared it with the majority of the increasingly self-conscious middle class, and yet were sufficiently ashamed of that class to be alert for the *chic* of any singularity, Mr. Tillotson's line on pudding seemed to them original and amusing. Edward was always sure that it must have been Maud's idea: his father would never have thought of it for himself; for in life as in his work Mr. Tillotson was a dialogue-polisher, not a maker.

At all events, Edward had never heard of the *Flaubert*. He supposed that it would be luxurious, but in that case he must have expected a very large, lofty dining-room with lustre chandeliers and a string band.

'I hope you'll like it,' David said. 'The food's supposed to be the best in London. Of course, one can't compare . . . have you ever been to Paris?'

'No. But my mother was French.'

'I say. I'd no idea. So you speak the language?'

'Yes. That is, I never do, actually. I read French books sometimes.'

It was too early to go straight to the *Flaubert*, and David said they would go to his club. It was in Pall Mall, which he pronounced Pell Mell. They went into what Edward thought of as a huge lounge, whose walls were covered with portraits which looked larger than life: the names engraved beneath them meant nothing to him. The elaborate ceiling mouldings were painted lightly in blue and gold and Edward sat in a deep leather arm-chair twice the size of any chair he had ever seen, with his head tilted back so that he could look at them. He was enchanted with them, and with the huge, warm room. There were fires at each end, in bright steel grates set in columned marbled chimney-pieces. The fires were of very neat logs and nowhere was there anything broken or chipped, yet nothing looked new. An old waiter, impassive and so pale of face and white of hair that Edward wondered if he were kept in a dark cupboard when not in use, served him with an enormous dry martini. Two elderly men stood with their backs to the fire as if they were at home, hands locked behind them. Rhythmically, they rose on their toes and fell back on their heels. They took it in turns to talk but Edward could see that neither listened to the other. He heard the words 'non-

intervention . . . Barcelona . . . international brigade', and, louder, suddenly clear, 'I warned the house after Guernica'. How did you warn a house, Edward wondered. Perhaps the word had been 'warmed'? 'I warmed the house after Guernica' made some kind of sense. One of the two old men looked amusingly like the photographs Edward had often seen of the Leader of the Opposition. He said so, laughing, to David, and David said, 'As a matter of fact, it is.' Edward had had his second martini by then and said nothing but 'Oh'. The house, then, was the House of Commons. He had evidently strayed into the cloud-cuckoo land of the daily newspaper's interminable serial story. And because, to him, and to the sort of people he knew, that is all it was, he was not excited, only wondering. The men whose faces stared out at you from the picture pages of the papers were not met with in three dimensions, even in processions or on platforms, they were as flat as stage scenery, though often as cleverly designed, so that they gave a pleasing illusion of thickness. That old gentleman rocking himself before the fire was as much the Leader of the Opposition as the Father Christmases in the stores in late December were Father Christmas: the representation, for his pleasure, of a mythical and immemorial personage, who, nevertheless, had some kind of real, albeit inconceivable, existence.

The two politicians moved off towards the dining-room. The Father Christmas one stopped by David's chair and said, 'Good evening, David. How's your father?' David stood up and said, 'Flourishing, sir, thank you.'

'I'm glad to hear it.'

Up to that point the exchange was so natural that Edward's conception of David's interlocutor as two-dimensional was disturbed. But then, and it was a kind of relief, the politician's face seemed suddenly much fuller; his waistcoat seemed to assume a convexity more dignified; the rather narrow shoulders grew full and round and stooped a little. And, paradoxically, this assumption of flesh at once cancelled the brief illusion of a third dimension. The new man was standing well above their heads, now, on an imaginary platform; he said, and the words seemed to print themselves in a cartoonist's balloon, 'I cannot say how grateful we are for the generosity of your father's new endowment of a research wing for the Dalston clinic.' In some way—it was all of a piece with the magical quality of the room itself; of Edward's friendship, so sudden and gratifying, with David Mendoza; of this materialization before his very eyes of a character in the long tale told day by day in the Press—he managed

to make the words point to his own merit as well as the philanthropist's.

When Edward and David got up to go Edward laughed a little to himself, discovering that the club martinis had softened the bones of his legs.

The restaurant was a complete surprise. It was on what he did not, of course, recognize as the *Maxim's* pattern, red-plush Edwardian with white and gold paint, small, warm, very intimate, and so swarming with waiters that there seemed to be several to every table.

'By the way,' David said, when they were in a corner which commanded the whole room but gave them a little privacy, 'there is no literary association in the name of this place. It's the proprietor's name. Here he comes, now.'

Flaubert was a very fat, dough-faced Frenchman with the small, black, bright and expressionless eyes of a weasel. He said, 'Monsieur Mendoza! How nice to see you again! You have come at the right moment, too; the lobster is quite good tonight.'

It was, as Edward discovered when he became familiar with the place later, Flaubert's practice to praise his goods in a series of understatements, or rather what would be taken for understatements. Of a great Lafitte (the restaurant's cellar was remarkable), he would say, '*Ce vin n'est pas mauvais*,' and then, thoughtfully translating, 'It is not a bad wine.' Now, continuing on the subject of the lobster, he said, 'Done *thermidor* it is eatable, I think. The *mornay* is even rather better, that is if you like *mornay*. It is not everybody who does. But my chef understands a *mornay* quite well. With a *mornay* he has . . .' He paused, seeking the phrase which would, one felt, tell the truth, the whole truth, but no more than the truth. '*Il a beaucoup de doigté*,' he concluded, softly snapping plump fingers.

Edward did not at once recognize the word. When he did it gave him as much pleasure as the ceiling mouldings in David's club. It was, he had thought, a word for books, not for use; it was almost a word to keep in a glass-fronted cabinet.

'A little early for lobster,' David said.

'For English lobster, yes. For it is not yet spring and this is a spring of the year beast. But Air France are good enough to bring me these lobsters from the Grotte de Sdragonato.' He shrugged and went on, 'You would perhaps do better with the *sôle maison*. After all'—he raised his hand to summon the passing *maître d'hôtel*—'there is no better fish and no better way of cooking it.'

This did not sound like positive praise but like resignation: the facts, regrettable though they might be, were as he had stated them. Edward was as delighted with M. Flaubert as with the moulded ceiling and the word *doigté*. And also with this notion, altogether new to him, of talking about food before, or even perhaps instead of, eating it. At home they just ate it. And in Maud's frightfully good little places, a hurried food-loathing waiter assumed they would take the table d'hôte and was impatient if they did not.

'Tell me about your electrical work,' David said, having dealt with the wine-waiter. Edward was almost drunk by then, for the first time in his life, and although a little uneasy at a faint premonition of nausea, he found talking too easy. Mechanically, his hand found a pencil and drew sine curves on the menu as he talked. But David watched his face. When Edward paused, David said, 'Of course, you ought to be at a University. I find all this completely incomprehensible and perfectly fascinating. It is like a glimpse of a beauty one had not suspected and which remains mysterious. I was never any good at mathematics but, perhaps for that very reason, I always had a feeling that the explanation of everything is to be found in it.'

Although this was to some extent Edward's own feeling, it embarrassed him and was over his head and, in spite of being exalted by wine, David's enthusiasm chilled him. David must have seen the coldness in his face; he said, hurriedly, 'And you read nothing but science?'

Edward ate his last piece of sole and swallowed a glass of wine and said, 'I read everything I can lay hands on.' As he said it he became aware that whereas he could not stop talking to Doris about what he read until, as she said, it 'got on her nerves' and in any case she understood none of it, he had no inclination to talk about it to David, who would have understood it.

'What sort of things?' he said, but Edward did not have to answer. A tall, grey-haired man was standing beside their table, as improbably 'distinguished'-looking as an advertisement for high-class tailoring. Despite the hair, the face was young, although the effect was impaired by a certain pouchiness about the eyes and a want of tension in the skin and flesh, a very slight puffiness, which was vaguely womanly. Edward must have stared, for the man deliberately turned his shoulder to him with a motion which was almost petulant, and said, 'David, I hope and trust that you are well. You look well, but with you swallow folk one can never be sure. I do hope you will

not mind me interrupting this agape, but one sees you so rarely of late that one has to seize the opportunity when it offers.'

David, blushing for the way in which his friend had turned his back on Edward, but not offering to introduce him, seemed suddenly very uneasy. Edward did not attend to what he was saying nor to the other man's answers, being intent on watching the dexterity with which the waiter was serving their chicken milanaise, but suddenly coming to himself when David stood up and walked his friend by the arm across the restaurant to his own table, where Edward watched him being introduced to the other man's guest, or perhaps she was his hostess, a thin-lipped bony-faced woman in a black suit of great severity. Then Edward had to deal with a small crisis, for the wine-waiter, in David's absence, had poured a little red wine into his glass from a cradled bottle, and now stood expectant. He clearly wanted something but Edward did not know what, and when his uncertainty appeared in his face a look of contempt marred the amiability of the waiter's, who said, 'If monsieur would be good enough to taste the wine.' Edward had had too much to drink to be timid and he was annoyed by the sneer he heard in the waiter's voice. He said, 'If it will give you any pleasure, but I wouldn't know the difference.'

At that the good nature returned to the waiter's face and as he leaned over Edward's shoulder to fill his glass he said, to Edward's astonishment, 'Nor would most of 'em in 'ere, if you ask me.'

Edward had not recovered from his surprise when David returned, full of half-finished, nervous apologies, the last of which, while Edward began to eat his chicken with a determination to enjoy it in which his stomach was not co-operating, was, 'I didn't introduce you because, frankly, he's apt to make himself a nuisance to anyone as good-looking as you are. I expect you know what I mean?'

Edward did not; and he did not enjoy being told he was good-looking: he wanted people to notice it, no doubt, but not to remark on it. He said, 'I don't see how he could, we're not very likely to meet again.'

During both question and answer David had watched Edward's face with such earnestness that his hands forgot their office and his knife and fork remained still and poised.

'You'll meet again all right if Michael takes a fancy to you,' he said, with the same disconcerting, thin sharpness which Edward had noticed when he had had to refuse his invitation to dinner.

'Michael what?'

'What does it matter? Oh, well, if you want to know, Major Michael Custer-Dwyer. He used to be in the Household Cavalry. Now he's head of Dwyer et Tisserant'—he gave it an exaggeratedly Gallic sound—'whose customers include two Bourbon princesses. Are you any the wiser?'

'Not very much.'

'Such is notoriety! Beginning from scratch, in ten years he has raised his firm to the level of Chanel and Molyneux and so forth and so on. Or so he claims. Tisserant is the woman with him. She used to be his head fitter. He pinched her from Coco . . . Chanel, you know. He's just made her his partner. They've been to New York opening a branch on Fifth Avenue. I said it seemed pretty risky since they've still got the depression and God knows how many unemployed over there. He said it's always safe to cater for the rich, and that there are three things the Americans can do and all of them will suit him. He said they can take a turn for the better, in which case he'll be dressing the wives and mistresses of the newest rich; or for the worse, in which case he'll be dressing the commissars' wives; or go to war, in which case there'll be the munitioneers' ladies. Michael's rather a bad lot.'

'Because he's so cynical?'

'Oh, Edward, you can't be that innocent! You can see what he is.'

Edward could; and he could not. He had seen that Major Custer-Dwyer was what in his house would have been called a pansy, but he did not know what it implied. He felt himself go very red in the face. The fact that C.S.B. was not a boarding-school might account for his innocence, or ignorance. The pinched sharpness of David's face made him very uneasy; and the closeness with which he watched him. David drank a glass of wine and said, 'Actually, I'm giving you the wrong impression. I think one should be absolutely tolerant, don't you? It's nobody's business but our own how one feels in such matters. And I know of some touching and noble friendships between men of Michael's tastes. That isn't what I have against him. It's that he's so terribly treacherous. I mean, he'll be extremely nice to your face and then say horrible, wounding things behind your back.'

'I see.'

'I hope you do. Have you ever had anything to do with people like Michael?'

'No, of course not.'

'Well, there's no need to be so emphatic!' David laughed, but it did not seem to Edward that he was really very amused. 'My question

was casual, not the beginning of a moral inquisition. I mean, whatever we may feel as twentieth-century Englishmen and all that, and although we may respect the law because it is the law, you cannot get away from the facts. I mean, Socrates and Plato and Leonardo and Proust and, for that matter, Shakespeare, all had the same tastes as Michael. I remember he gave me their whole roll of honour once. It was most impressive.'

Edward was confused: David seemed to him to have changed his front somewhere. But this confusion was part of a more general one which was invading his mind and returning, with renewed force, to his stomach. The last glass of red wine had seriously upset him, and David broke off what he was saying to stare at his face and say, 'Edward, don't you feel well?'

'No, I don't. Where's the gents?'

'God! I am sorry, it's my fault. Those fearsome club martinis. The door's over there on the left just beyond Michael's table. Shall I come with you?'

'No.'

Edward crossed the room somehow although his own personal earthquake was rocking it. He was two people, one cut off from the other by some kind of muffling barrier; the inside one was wondering whether the slow rocking of the floor which the outside one experienced, was producing the lurching gait he had observed among old, shabby men with tortured faces outside Overbury Park pubs on a Saturday night. Then, passing like the scenery outside the window of a slow train, there was Major Custer-Dwyer's face, looming, enormous, flabby, swaying like a balloon. Edward was not aware of the door. Then he had his forearm along the top of a porcelain urinal and his forehead against the blessed coolness of its back, and was vomiting. Presently, purged, cold, shaking slightly but well again, he was coming upright on a still, firm floor and looking towards the wash-basins for water to cleanse the foulness from his mouth. Custer-Dwyer was standing there, a full glass ready in his hand. He handed it to him, said 'Rotten luck. Better now?' smiled, squeezed Edward's shoulder and went out again into the restaurant. And, having drunk the water and checked his presentableness in the looking-glass, Edward followed him. Back at the table, David said, 'You look better, thank God! I didn't come. I thought you'd rather be left to yourself. Were you sick?'

'As a dog. I'm awfully sorry.'

'My dear Edward! . . . I saw Michael go in after you, did he . . .?'

'Not after me. For his own reasons.'

'Oh. Are you sure?'

'Of course I'm sure,' Edward said, angrily.

'Well, don't bite my head off.'

Edward did not want any more dinner. He had coffee while David ate a pear. Then Major Custer-Dwyer was at their table again, saying to Edward, 'Feeling better, old chap?' and to David, 'Why not join us for coffee?'

'Alas! Too late! We're just going.'

'A pity.' He turned to Edward again. 'We shall meet again I'm sure, Mr. . . . ?'

'Tillotson.'

* * *

David started coming into the gifts department on Monday afternoons, or calling Edward on the house-phone, and asking him to go out. Once, when Doris was tea-orderly and wheeled the cup-laden trolley to his table, and he spoke with impatience of David's rather too pressing friendliness, she laughed and said, 'Now you know what it's like to be pestered.'

'If you mean I pester you . . . besides, it's ridiculous, it's not the same thing at all.'

'Ain't it? Looks like it to me. And I never said as you pester me; I never said you don't, neither. I just said you know what it's like being pestered, see? No cause to fly off like that, so keep your hair on.'

David's invitations became a routine and so did Edward's answers. He could never accept unless the date suggested was a Tuesday. The explanation which he gave and which was accepted by both parties, who both knew it to be untrue, so that the whole thing had a flavour of international politics, was that he had to study in the evenings; and that he allowed himself Tuesdays off. Tuesday was the night Doris washed her hair. That, at least, was the treaty convention between her and Edward, as study was the convention between him and David. On Wednesday mornings Edward would look anxiously at her hair and sometimes, but not always, he could see that it was less firmly 'set' than usual and had, indeed, been washed. Even so, he was not perfectly free from the jealousy which affected him like acid indigestion on the other occasions, when it was obvious that her hair had not been washed. For, having no sister, he did not know whether it really took a whole evening for a girl to wash her hair. It took him weeks to discover a formula sufficiently casual to satisfy his secretive-

ness and at the same time discover from Maud the answer to this harassing question. He did it while pretending to read the paper and calling out from behind it (thus keeping his possibly tell-tale face hidden), 'These hair-wash advertisements! It cannot possibly take even a woman a whole evening at home to wash her hair!'

'It's the drying,' Maud explained, 'my hair, for instance, takes hours to dry, it's so thick. My hairdresser says it's the thickest hair she's ever seen.'

Was Doris's hair thick? Sometimes Edward thought it was, and was at peace on those Wednesdays when it had been washed the night before; other times, he was sure that it was not, that it would dry in an hour, half an hour, or that being Doris she would not hesitate to go out with it still wet.

He knew better than to question her. For if a question inconvenienced her, she lied, simply, without art, as if she wanted the lie to be a challenge to quarrel with her. Edward put up with it, as he was putting up with that other misery, the evenings when he was really driven to study because although he could not accept David's invitations in case Doris agreed to go for a drive or to the pictures, she, at the last moment, refused, either without explanation or else saying that she was going to see her married sister. For all Edward knew she really was going to see her married sister. But why not let him come? And who did she meet there? And if she did not go there, wasn't it likely that she joined, with some plain friend, the parade of girl couples walking briskly or loitering in the neighbourhood of the Holloway Road? And he saw her going through the routine, the mental image coming between himself and his textbook, saw her or her friend look over her shoulder at the passing males in hunting pairs who called after them or whistled, or muttered one of the formulae which were the convention, until a coagulation occurred, two couples of opposite sex became a foursome, then, like a breeding amoeba, broke into two again, but this time couples of assorted sexes. That was what, in pain and anger, Edward visualized in long intervals of staring stillness between working examples from his book on calculus. He was putting up with these things because he could do no other; and also because he had something tremendous to look forward to: Doris had promised to come away with him for the four-day Easter holiday.

When he had planned this he had it in mind to take her to his aunt's at Goudhurst. Because Doris was his own creation, as the people we love *d'amour* always are and remain until they destroy our

love by asserting their objective existence so strongly that we cannot any longer maintain the pretence that they are an aspect of ourselves, she was always delighted, in the imaginary exchanges he had with her in day-dreams, with the plans he made for them. And her quite different reaction when the time came to talk of these plans out loud, in her real presence, was always a shock of disappointment to him, and a cause of as much resentment as if she had formerly welcomed and ratified the plans not only in his imagination but in reality; and then completely changed her mind.

In the case of their Easter holiday he had actually written to his aunt and told her all about his legacy (rather belatedly), and about buying the Sunbeam and about having a friend whose name was Doris. And knowing that the house had two spare rooms, he had asked if he could bring Doris down for Easter. The two spare rooms were together in a small side wing of the house, and he knew that they would be as free of access to each other as if they were in one room. His aunt wrote back:

‘My dear Teddy,

Your uncle and I are very glad you want to come for Easter. Let us hope that the weather is better than last year! I am afraid you will not get any horse riding except the old pony. Mr. Tuff went out with the hunt in December and poor Caesar fell badly at Fagge’s Dyke and broke two legs and had to be destroyed. It was Lady Mary who did it, they being so near the big house, with poor Captain Vincent’s army revolver. There was trouble about that because Slope, the new policeman—Earnle has retired at last and has a cottage near Grebedene—is very much the new broom and wanted to know if the Vincents had a licence, and it seems they had not which Earnle would never have troubled about and as your uncle says, what a waste of tax payer’s money. Mr. Tuff is saying he cannot afford a new hunter to replace poor Caesar. Fancy you having a young lady!!! It seems only yesterday you were no higher than the dining-room table!! And a motor too! I always thought of course that your poor grandfather would leave you his little bit of money, it was only right.

Any friend of yours will always be very welcome here. If you send me the name and address I will write a letter to her mother.

Your uncle sends his love.

Your affec. aunt

Sarah Tillotson.’

The rather numerous exclamation marks in Sarah Tillotson's letters were not scattered at random. Edward knew that she made discriminating use of them: he knew that she found his having a 'young lady' more worthy of amazement than the swift passage of time since he had been as high as the dining-room table. Why his having a motor should be less surprising, in fact no more surprising than last Easter's weather, Edward did not know. Perhaps she had read in the paper that young men did squander their money on cars. The word 'poor' as used by her had only a very vaguely sympathetic meaning, and signified little more than *deceased* and in addition, perhaps, his aunt's feeling that the dead were to be pitied, which she might well feel if she had come to believe that they must all suffer the fate his uncle's religion consigned them to. That she used the word of a dead horse as well as a dead man did not weaken this argument: his aunt made no distinction between people and animals, they were both living beings and therefore to be respected and loved.

It had not occurred to him that Doris would be a painful shock to his aunt and even, perhaps, to his uncle. On second thoughts, not to his uncle: Walter Tillotson did not notice differences between people, they were all sinners to him in the sense that people are constituents to politicians and patients to doctors: they were equals in sin before him as before his God. But Edward's aunt would have been horrified by Doris's commonness. For, though she loved all living creatures, she liked them in their place, and it would have seemed to her that Doris was as out of place in her front room, or as Edward's young lady, as a horse would have been. Edward's Aunt Sarah was not a snob, but nor was she a saint and she had a strong sense of class. Doris's vile English would have upset her and so would her table-manners if Doris had relaxed from the standard she had learnt from the pictures and 'been herself'. However, Mrs. Tillotson's good-nature was never put to the test of receiving Doris.

Because, when Edward suggested the plan to Doris, she would not hear of it. She said, 'Me waste me four days' 'oliday among all them cows and that? Are you loony, mate?'

Her occasional use of the word *mate*, with its implication of mere comradeship, always chilled him. And her rejection of a plan for their pleasure, in this case particularly, since it was to entail taking her to bed at last, was a disagreeable shock, breaking, as it did, the promises which the Doris who lived in his heart and mind had made with such exquisite sweetness. Sulkily, Edward asked her, 'Well, what do you want to do then?'

'We're supposed to be going for a good time. What's the matter with Southend?'

He agreed, of course. He wrote and booked a room at an hotel and in the following weeks forgot his disappointment about her attitude to the country in making her answer all his hopes of the way she would behave at Southend when, in five weeks' time, they at last shared a room instead of the seat of a car; and four days instead of four hours.

Edward's Tuesday outings with David were a change from the pictures, although they did once go to see a French film. Once they went for a long drive, dining at Folkestone and coming back by night with David driving as if they were on a race track, the supercharger whining, the car being sucked forward into the hole which its own lights pierced in the night under a lowering sky and a thin drizzle. They always had the car open. The second time they went out in it there was a suede *canadienne* lined with sheep-skin thrown on to the back seat, and a flying helmet. David said, casually, 'You'd better borrow those.' He himself wore a short cloth coat lined and collared with a silky, dark chocolate-coloured fur. When Edward admired it he said, 'Sable. I have a foolish mania for fur. It's absurd that fur coats have gone out for men. But one cannot wear them now without being taken for a theatrical magnate or something worse.' Later, when they were parting, Edward started to take off the *canadienne*, but David said, 'Oh, keep it for the time being, if you take it off now you'll catch your death, as they say.' It did not occur to Edward until long after he had come to regard it as his own, that it had been bought for him.

Once they went to the Old Vic to see *Hamlet*. Coming out of the theatre after the play David said, 'Everything we've written since is either a gloss on that or mere entertainment.' And as Edward had nothing to say to that, he suddenly halted in their stumbling search for the car in the park and declaimed, to the astonishment of the old man who looked after the cars and who stood gaping and forgetting to wipe the snot from his nose with the back of his hand. '"O Hamlet, Hamlet, how escape from the shadow of your spirit! How cease to follow you in everything, even in the loathsome enjoyment of one's own self-depreciation!'"'

'Goodness!' Edward said. He was embarrassed.

'It's not mine. Turgenev. You must read him, Edward. But don't you feel how true that is?'

'No. Here's the car, look, over here.'

'No, of course you don't, it was a silly question. I hope you never will.'

Another time there was a party at David's flat, which was the top floor of a house belonging to his father, in Avenue Road, leading into Regent's Park. Edward knew nobody. There was an impression of crowding and noise, confusing luxury, too much to drink. And afterwards a memory of David saying, as he paused to speak to him on his way across the room to try stopping a row between a man with a full black beard and a bespectacled girl with hair *en brosse*, 'Why do I give parties? It's not as if I liked these people.' It was impossible that the remark pass unheard, and a small man with a colourless face and eyes like a spoonful of sea-water and hair like woodwool turned and said, 'But you like me, David.' 'No, I don't, I hate you and moreover I don't remember inviting you,' David said. Edward was shocked and embarrassed, but the pale guest only laughed and turning to him said, 'I suppose you paint or write or design clothes.'

'No, I'm not anything much,' Edward said. The other man gave a snickering laugh and said, 'Admirable! I'm a solicitor myself, which could, I suppose, be described in the same terms. And it's a fact I wasn't invited, I came with Moses.'

It seemed a curious claim. 'Moses?'

'Not the prophet, the poet. Do you know him?'

'No.'

'He's amusing. He says that Hitler is the Whore of Babylon, which seems unlikely but you never know. He's the living proof of Hippolyte Taine's theory that there is a natural sympathy between the Hebrew and English tongues. He was brought up to be a rabbi, and writes English poetry like a seventeenth-century rhetorician.' Edward recalled this conversation when, years later, he came across this solicitor, who by then had risen by way of acting for men arrested by the police in public lavatories for acts of indecency, to the leadership of an important law reform movement, and into the House of Commons.

David had told Edward not to come to the party in the Sunbeam as he could then drink without worrying, and that he, who was incapable of being drunk, would drive him home. He had said he would like to do that, it would give him some fresh air after the party. But, very late, after everyone else had gone, he said, 'I'm too lazy to drive tonight. Why not stay? I have two beds in my room and I can lend you pyjamas. Pure silk!' he added, with a kind of forced gaiety overlying an earnestness, and even urgency, which disturbed

Edward. 'We can phone your people,' David said when Edward hesitated, but at that moment the door opened and a woman Edward had not seen before came in. She was about sixty, with grey hair cut short and set in solid-seeming waves which looked incongruous above a lined and tragic face. David, whose own face had been flushed with excitement, turned white, so that his dark eyes seemed to glitter unnaturally. He said, 'Mummy! How nice! You're too late for the party, which is perhaps as well. Darling, this is Edward Tillotson and I can't stay and talk to you because I am about to drive him home.'

Edward was surprised when he said this and by what seemed to be her strange answer. For, 'I'm glad to hear it,' she said, with a grimness which matched her face but not her hair-do. And doubtless aware that this was hardly polite to their guest, she faced Edward, without a smile and with something like reproach in her face, and said, 'Glad, I mean, that David is driving you home, Mr. Tillotson, and not leaving you to the dismal experience of a last bus or train.'

'I'm afraid they will all have gone,' Edward mumbled. Her mere presence was a rebuke.

'Of course.' And, to David, with an effort to seem cheerful, 'I hope you enjoyed your party, dear?'

'Yes, thank you, Mummy,' he replied, exactly as a child says very-well-thank-you to an inquiry after its health.

He and Edward were half-way home before David offered an explanation and then it was lame: 'My mother, bless her, has very strict ideas of what is due to a guest in her house. She hates sudden arrangements. She likes everything properly arranged in advance.'

A little later he said, 'Anyway, it seemed to me that you were not very enthusiastic about staying.'

One morning, while Edward was receiving instructions for the day's work from Mr. Pardoner, he happened to say that something in one of the letters they were dealing with was 'absurd'. Mr. Pardoner looked at him very sharply and frowned. Edward noticed that his eyebrows had grown very bushy—Mr. Pardoner had once told him that his barber insisted on trimming them which made their growth all the more luxuriant. They made his frown portentous as he said, 'England, Tillotson, is two nations. On the one hand are the people who pronounce A-B-S-U-R-D *abfurd*. I am one of them and so, until a couple of weeks ago, were you. On the

other hand there are the people who say *abzurd*, such as David Mendoza. You seem to have gone over to the enemy, Tillotson.'

Edward flushed and laughed and said he had not realized it, which was true.

'Which is correct?' he asked.

'I don't know and it isn't the point. Well, I think we've covered everything. Off with you.'

During his morning's work, Edward kept repeating 'abçurd, abzurd; abçurd, abzurd'. He was never to be quite at ease with the word again. He said abzurd to some people and abçurd to others, and no doubt a psychologist could make something of that.

Doris was one of the people to whom he said abçurd. They went out together that night and at first all went well because Edward had a case of forged gift coupons and the resultant police inquiry to talk about, and especially of his own part in it. Doris listened with attention and interest, but under cover of a kind of sulkiness as if she gave them in spite of herself. They were having a fish-tea at a Lyons and quite suddenly, interrupting Edward's account of what the inspector had said to Mr. Pardoner about altering the watermark of Mendoza's coupon paper, she pushed her plate away and said, 'I don't see what cause you had to stick your nose in. Doing the p'lice's job for them. They're bad enough without us helping them. But I s'pose your lordship thinks different.'

'Now what's the matter?' Edward said. It was natural to her, as he had discovered, to his astonishment, to be hostile to the police, whom she regarded rather as the troops of an enemy nation in occupation of her native land; but Edward did not believe she cared that much about it. And she revealed that his helping the police had been seized upon as a mere excuse to quarrel by going on, 'I'm fed up with this place. We always come here and we always do the same things. The trouble with you is, you're mean.'

Edward did not know what had given rise to this outburst. He was astounded by it. He had settled into their routine and he had no doubt assumed that she had done likewise. It is possible that she had been talking with her friends, or that they had been jeering at her, and that she had concluded that she was not getting much, by cinema standards, out of her association with a member of the middle classes, 'white collar' workers as the newspapers called them, by which they meant people who did no work with their hands and were consequently, as in ancient China, superior persons.

'I don't know why you should say that,' Edward began, astounded

at her attack, and much hurt by the accusation of meanness. Doris interrupted him, 'It's all right for you with your little boy-friend. I bet he doesn't take you to Lyons.'

'You mean you want to go to a posh place?'

'Why not? Aren't I good enough?'

'Good God, it's not that! I just didn't think . . .'

'No, you don't think, that's your trouble. It's always your convenience and never mind me.'

This was both grossly unfair and perfectly true: because, loving her, that is assimilating her to himself, he made no distinction between her convenience and his own. 'I'll take you where he took me the other night,' he said.

'Where's that?'

'The smartest restaurant in town. It's called the *Flaubert*.'

'Never 'eard of it.'

'Nor had I. But he knows the best places, you can be sure of that.'

'I'm not so sure he does. Don't forget he's an ikeymo . . .' (Edward had discovered that 'Yid' is not a working-class usage; ikeymo was, perhaps, a very local term. He never heard anyone but Doris make use of it.) ' . . . They have their own places.'

'Not the top ones, apparently. This place wasn't what I had expected but . . . well, I can't exactly explain but you could tell at once that it was . . . well, what Dav . . . what Mendoza said it was.'

Although he was not conscious of doing so at the time, ever since Edward had made the association between his grandfather's name and the race values which the Nazis were forcing upon the world, he had gradually assumed a particular detachment of manner, an unusual degree of ignorance, where Jews were concerned.

'Will you really take me there?' Doris said.

'Of course.'

'What'll it cost, Ted?'

'I don't know. Two or three quid I daresay.'

'Crikey!'

Her eyes shone like stars on a frosty night and her cheeks were flushed: Edward was to see girls deeply moved by love, by great music, by a sublime panorama from a high pass; Doris was like that then; the spending of three pounds on one meal had to do duty for those other wonders.

As he did not know whether it would be necessary to reserve a table—he had noticed reservation chits on some tables at the *Flaubert*—Edward had to catch David during the morning of the next day,

and ask him. When he knew what Edward wanted, he turned full on him with a quick, suspicious movement, 'The *Flaubert*? What on earth for? Who with?'

'With Doris.'

That seemed to relieve what had all the appearance of acute anxiety. David looked at him for a moment in silence and then said, 'Oh. Yes, I think that's rather a good idea, such a treat for her. Look, I'll ask my secretary to ring old Flaubert for you.'

David's attitude to Doris was one of tolerance: Edward never knew what he felt, but he never showed either contempt or jealousy, and was on the whole rather paternal about Edward's infatuation, as he called it. 'No, I don't want to meet her,' he said once, 'it wouldn't do; I shouldn't know what to say to her. I daresay she's all you tell me. You have your fun and let's leave it at that.' Edward objected that it was not a question of having fun, but David would not let him explain: 'I know, Edward, I know! You don't have to tell me.' 'You've never mentioned a girl,' Edward said. 'No, I haven't, have I? How right you are.' Very suddenly his manner had changed, his face had looked exactly like his mother's as Edward had seen it on the night of the party.

* * *

Doris's best dress was a plain black woollen garment set off by a string of Woolworth's pearls. Edward was very surprised and relieved at her taste; he knew nothing about women's clothes but that was not what he had expected; and although he could not have explained why, he was reassured. When he praised her appearance she was rather curt and it was obvious that she did not want to talk about her dress. Had Edward understood about women's clothes and really been able to judge the dress, her reserve about it, coupled with the fact that he would have realized that it cost at least half a year of Doris's wages, would have plunged him into a new nightmare of jealous speculation. The dress would have implied a whole new and secret life which Doris must be living and of which he knew nothing and had not suspected; he would have deduced a rich lover, perhaps some greasy, middle-aged commercial traveller who could get good clothes wholesale. He would have given this disgusting creature a face, manners, a background of wife and family and house and car. He would have become obsessed with hatred of him.

And he would not have existed, it would all have been unnecessary. Doris was reserved about the dress because she was ashamed of its provenance; and it was in 'good taste' instead of her own livelier

taste because of that same provenance. The poor of many countries in the nineteenth century revolted against their lot; those of England submissively wore the cast-off clothing of their betters; the practice lingered, and perhaps still lingers. For many years Doris's mother had worked as a 'daily woman' for the wife of a prosperous stock-broker, enabling her employer to keep house servants by taking 'the rough' off their hands. This woman was generous with clothes which she or her family were tired of or had grown out of, and about a quarter of the garments worn by Doris's family came from that source. As a rule they were things which had to be cut-down, let-out, made-over; but from time to time there was a dress which Doris could wear almost without alteration. Such dresses were not what she would have bought for herself; it was no doubt her mother who made her see that she could not have afforded anything nearly so good; and some of them, the black she wore to the *Flaubert* for example, suited her, at least in eyes more sophisticated than her own.

All Edward knew was that she looked very nice, very 'quiet', that the dress enhanced her beauty and made her look very classy.

The *Flaubert's* menu was one of those enormous cards with the names of dishes written in bold cursive script and violet ink. As soon as they were at their table and the *maitre d'hôtel* had given them menus, Doris put hers down after a glance and, with a wonderful air of slight boredom, said, 'Choose for me.' Her conduct was, indeed, subdued; or, rather, watchful and careful. Edward was reminded of a kitten emerging for the first time from the bottom of the kitchen cupboard where it has been born and reared—the eyes dark and brilliant with curiosity, the whole body tense with caution, the nerves so stretched that the least abrupt movement or loud sound produces a halt, a shrinking back, a fresh and thorough survey of the possibly dangerous environment. He had never seen this careful Doris before, thinking twice before she spoke and then, after all, saying nothing. He was a little depressed by her.

He was not much more at ease with the huge menu than she was; he could read it but it did not mean anything. Seeing this, the *maitre d'hôtel* was helpful, and stooping over him to touch the suggested items with his pencil, no doubt so that he could see the prices of the dishes, said, 'If I may suggest, monsieur, the *bisque*, a *coquille St. Jacques*, and the *tournedos maison* with a green salad.'

'I think that would be very nice,' Edward said.

Doris became a wonderful example of the deceptiveness of appearances: that detachment from what was going on which was

due to a determination to make no mistakes by adopting a quietist policy, looked exactly, to Edward at least, like the indifference of custom. When he gave his approval of the waiter's suggestion an interrogative note, for her benefit, she merely nodded.

As soon as they were alone again, M. Flaubert himself approached, followed by a wine-waiter carrying an ice-bucket with a bottle in it. Phlegmatic, expressionless, he offered Edward a flabby hand to shake and said, 'We are glad to see you, monsieur.' To Doris he bowed. She smiled, and Edward was fascinated to see that the fierceness of her smile, that smile of the slums which is a mockery, which reverts to the snarl of its origins, had all gone; the smile was demure, sweet, well-bred, a smile, like her dress, suitable to the place. Did she know how to do it by some social instinct, or had she copied it on the spot from a girl at the next table? He did not know. M. Flaubert said, 'I have a message from Mr. Mendoza, who begs that you will drink a glass of champagne with him.' And he motioned the wine-waiter to come forward with his bottle. It made Edward very angry. There was something like a fawning persecution in David's conduct which he resented without understanding.

'We don't want champagne . . .' he began, but Doris, speaking for the first time since delegating the choice of their dinner to him, said 'I do.'

Flaubert turned to her and, with a little irony in voice and eyes, said, 'It is Louis Roederer of my own reserve, mademoiselle. Not, perhaps, as dry as most English people like it, which mademoiselle will allow me to say is too dry, but still, not sweet and of a good year. Monsieur and mademoiselle will find it quite drinkable.'

The dislike of the human race which he contrived to express by the use of the third person was probably amusing to his real clients, but to Edward, who was too young for such bitter flavours, it was distressing. He said, 'Well, all right,' to get rid of him, and when he had moved to another table said, 'I'll have something to say to David about this.'

'I think it was ever so nice of him.'

'Butting in. Why can't he leave me alone? I'd've bought you champagne if you'd wanted it.'

That prompted her to taste her wine; she made a face and, reverting momentarily to her own style, said, 'Crikey. Cat's piddle and soda water.'

All the same, she drank her share of the bottle that night and from lovely became radiant as the wine eased her constraint and made her

swift adoption of new movements, new words, new manners deft and easy instead of awkward and laborious.

They were eating their *tournedos*. Edward was just beginning to emerge from his own nervousness and to enjoy the evening. It did not matter that they had little to say to each other now that what they said they meant, and were no longer talking to make a social noise; they were rude about the looks of their neighbours, for, conscious of their youth and beauty, they could be arrogant on that level. But Edward hardly did more than glance away from her, his eyes were always on her face, it was a treasure he had there and he would not be distracted from his enjoyment of it. So that he started, as if roused from sleep, when a voice said, 'So you cut your acquaintance when dining in town, Mr. Tillotson?'

It was Major Custer-Dwyer, accompanied again by the Tisserant woman, his partner. Edward remembered his manners and stood up. Custer-Dwyer said, 'Please introduce us to your friend,' without taking his eyes off Edward and with barely a glance at Doris. Edward named her to both of them. Mme Tisserant smiled at Doris and Edward was surprised to see so eager, so almost pathetically friendly, a smile on the woman's hard face. Custer-Dwyer said, 'Come to think of it you two haven't met either. David Mendoza was keeping you so much to himself the other evening. Zenobie, this is Mr. Edward Tillotson, Madame Tisserant.' Edward said, 'Pleased to meet you.' Custer-Dwyer's quizzical smile was indulgently brief. Mme Tisserant touched the fingers of Edward's offered hand, while still looking at Doris.

'We're over there,' Custer-Dwyer said, nodding at a table across the room, 'come and join us for coffee when you're ready.' Before Edward could refuse, Doris said, 'Ta, we will. More the merrier is my motto.' Mme Tisserant laughed with real pleasure at this witticism, and the laugh seemed to give Doris a licence to be even more nearly herself. She winked at the major, who, if taken aback, did not show it, but winked back. In thickly accented English, Mme Tisserant said, 'It will be quite a little party, eh?'

When they had gone to their own table Doris said, 'She's a foreigner, then?'

'French.'

'Who are they?'

Edward told her what he knew.

'Zenobie, he called her. What a name to go to bed with.'

Although Edward's instinct would have been to refuse the major's

invitation, he saw that by knowing these people he had improved the evening for Doris, that she was enjoying the idea of having coffee with them. (He doubted whether she had ever drunk black coffee before in her life or seen a *demi-tasse*. When it came to it, it would have been impossible to tell that she had not done so after every meal of her adult life.) He was pleased with this success and it was that which led him on to encourage her to enjoy Mme Tisserant's and the major's company, until suddenly he saw what he was doing. But that was half an hour later; and too late. To Doris's rude comment on Mme Tisserant's name, he said, 'It would be Zenobia in English. She was an Eastern queen who led her own armies into battle.'

'Must be catching. This one looks as if she'd do the same for two pins.'

It was true: Mme Tisserant had the look of a bad-tempered senior staff officer. 'She's even got a moustache,' Doris said, and twisted an imaginary one into points a foot long. This was cruel: Zenobie Tisserant's moustache was no more than a faint, dark down . . .

When Edward was asked if they would take coffee he said that they were having it 'over there'. He could see that the others had reached the cheese course. Custer-Dwyer was evidently keeping an eye on them for he saw him wave and make hospitable gestures signifying that they were to come over at once. He asked for his bill and paid it; it was exactly what he had calculated that it would be, which was a relief, although he had brought plenty of money with him. They had the length of the room to go; both Major Custer-Dwyer and Mme Tisserant kept smiling eyes on them all the way. Custer-Dwyer rose and held a chair for Doris to sit beside Mme Tisserant. Edward took the fourth chair. M. Flaubert was passing and the major said, 'Flaubert, ask your *sommelier* to bring that *vieille cure* of yours' and, to Edward, 'You'll take a brandy?'

'Not for me.'

'Miss Doris will perhaps like a liqueur,' Mme Tisserant said.

'Yes, but you choose for me,' Doris said; it was said very girlishly. Edward suddenly remembered looking up from his desk in Mendoza's at a shrill outburst of obscene abuse from the far side of the sorting table, to see his sweetheart grab her neighbour by the hair and hit her twice in the face with her clenched fist.

'Share the joke,' Custer-Dwyer said, in a low and intimate voice. Edward flushed and said, 'I didn't know there was one.'

Doris was whispering to Mme Tisserant, who nodded and

pointed across the room. Doris rose and walked away. Mme Tisserant, continuing her policy of ignoring Edward's existence, turned to Major Custer-Dwyer and, confident that Edward would not understand a word, they talked in French, the major, however, with a kind of reluctance, and constantly throwing their guest apologetic glances.

Mme Tisserant, with her eyes on the point where Doris had disappeared into the ladies' room, asked Major Custer-Dwyer, 'What dost thou think?' to which the major replied, with another question, 'Of the little one?' and a shrug. He then said that the girl was a nice shape, he granted her, but of a commonness! When he was talking French, he seemed to Edward, who was following this conversation with downcast eyes, to be French. But as Edward had not seen a French person, to his knowledge, since his mother ran away when he was six, he was not a very good judge. To Major Custer-Dwyer's faint praise and louder blame, his companion replied, with sharp indignation, that 'she was sensational!' Custer-Dwyer dryly suggested that they should avoid exaggeration and hoped that Zenobie would do him the pleasure to leave the girl alone, explaining that 'he wanted no stories with the boy, here'. Edward was surprised at this, and did not know what the major meant. Mme Tisserant said, 'How, leave her alone?' angrily, and pointed out that 'the little Morrière was leaving them and that not personal, but strictly business, considerations explained her zeal. She went on to point out that 'this Doris' would be a thousand times better and that he had only to look at her walk. Edward reflected that it was true that Doris walked with striking grace. Custer-Dwyer, evidently anxious to put an end to the discourtesy of speaking a language unknown to the third person present, said that this had not occurred to him and that perhaps she, Zenobie, was right. Mme Tisserant concluded this brisk exchange by saying, '*Sensationnel, je te dis! On l'embauche?*' Edward was not familiar with this last word, but guessed that Mme Tisserant was seeking Major Custer-Dwyer's approval for her plan of offering Doris a job. The major's shrug seemed to give grudging consent.

It is perhaps curious that although Edward did not much dislike Custer-Dwyer and was not worried by what David had said about him, since it did not concern him; and although he did not care that Mme Tisserant clearly disliked him, neither of these people seemed to him trustworthy. He had followed the conversation, although there were some words—slang perhaps—or ways of using them

which were strange to him. But, despite the major's apologetic glances he resented being excluded from the talk and he was uneasy at the tone of their references to Doris and perhaps a little frightened at the suggestion that some plan they had for employing her might involve trouble with him. A few minutes were still to pass before he realized that if he valued his own happiness he should have tried to get Doris away at once, before anything could be said to her; in that few minutes his wish to thrust himself back into the front rank, to put on a show and be applauded, led him to help Mme Tisserant to defeat him. (Not that they, of course, saw it in that light.) So that when Custer-Dwyer, reverting to English, said sulkily to Mme Tisserant, 'You can try if you like,' Edward looked up, as if it were the reversion to English which was letting him in, and said, with a fatuousness not quite deliberate, 'Nothing venture, nothing get.'

Custer-Dwyer and Mme Tisserant both looked at him doubtfully, for what he had said might derive solely from that one English phrase of their exchange, or from his having understood the whole of it. Custer-Dwyer said, 'It's shockingly rude of us to talk French. But poor Zenobie finds it a terrible strain to speak English all the time. Do please forgive us.'

Doris was making her way back between the tables and, like Mme Tisserant, Edward was watching her come. Without taking his eyes off her he said, in French, and noticing even as he spoke how bad his accent had become, for he had not talked his mother's language for years, in fact not since he had lisped and prattled it, 'Of course, I understand. And you are so right about Doris, madame, she is sensational and she walks with such grace.'

Mme Tisserant went white with anger; and Custer-Dwyer, after blushing all over his face, laughed, an oddly shrill laugh with little merriment in it, and ending with a sort of gurgle and, 'Oh, God, that's terribly funny.' But not a flicker of amusement relaxed the displeasure of the Frenchwoman's face. Doris, sitting down in her place again, said, 'What's so funny?'

'The joke's on us, Miss Doris,' the major said. Doris smiled sweetly on them all. As if determined to destroy himself, but animated by the need to keep the initiative with Doris, to make her seem to owe any advantage to him and only to him, Edward said, trying to make it sound as if the suggestion had come from him, 'Mme Tisserant wants to offer you a job, Doris.'

'A job? Me?'

Tisserant glared at him like an officer-of-the-day who has spotted

a private with his hair over his ears. But to Doris she said, 'You perhaps know that we are *couturiers*, my dear, dressmakers. We need a new mannequin, a model girl, you understand, to show off the models. By the way, I like the little Paquin thing you are wearing, but you are too young for all black. It is smart, yes, I do not say the contrary, but a young girl, so very young, should be perhaps not so much smart as sweet. But this job—it is for our London shop, later for Paris, even, possibly, New York. You have the figure, the movement, the face.'

Edward saw Doris's mouth open for one of her Crikeys or Blimeys; but then it closed into a firm line, her eyes became as watchful as the Frenchwoman's, and with a refinement which Edward found insufferable, she said, 'Well, I don't know I'm sure.'

'Hadn't you better ask what pay you'll get?' Edward said, his determination to keep a sort of proprietorial status leading him ever nearer to his own defeat. Custer-Dwyer said, 'Miss Doris would begin at three pounds ten a week.'

It was more than twice her pay at Mendoza's. And suddenly Edward realized how he was casting himself away, that he should have been doing everything in his power to prevent this happening instead of helping it on just in order to be playing a leading role. He knew, whatever he might pretend in his day-dreams, that he had no hold on Doris. Earning more than he did, working in the West End of London, in Paris perhaps, even, remote as the moon to him, in New York, she would be altogether out of his reach, she would be surrounded by brilliant people, society women, rich men, *débutantes* and their escorts. He was suddenly and violently jealous of all these as yet imaginary people. It was quite certain that she would drop him, forget him, learn a language and manners he did not know and even more alien than the one, already sufficiently strange to him, of her birth. And he had himself thrust her half-way into this new world to which he had no way in.

He heard the rest of their conversation but only as if it were at a neighbouring table; he was eavesdropping, not partaking, and that absent-mindedly, for his own mind was occupied with examining and rejecting measures for recovering the position. For the first time since he had set eyes on her it came into his mind that he might try to persuade Doris to marry him. From all he had heard, that was what girls wanted. The notion frightened him, but he faced it, and accepted it. The obstacles should not stop him. His mind, as if for refuge, began to work at practical details: Would there be room for

them at home? He heard Mme Tisserant's voice saying, 'Four pounds a week and a year's contract.' And Custer-Dwyer's protest, '*Non, mais écoute, Zen!*'

'Four quid,' Doris said, and, 'Tell us more about the work, like.'

Edward heard a word here and there as his mind busied itself fitting Doris and himself as man and wife into the Overbury Park household. He was thinking that the top floor could be partitioned off by a new door, making it into a separate flat. Mme Tisserant's voice, deep and powerful, was saying, '. . . so really it is just walking about in very pretty clothes, my dear, and seeing everybody who is anybody, and . . .' He lost the rest in the physical difficulties of fitting an extra lavatory into his father's house and in wondering about the cost, and whether he could, after all, get that hundred pounds back from his father. He even missed the conclusion and when he returned to present consciousness Custer-Dwyer was paying his bill and saying, 'Why don't you people come back to my flat for coffee and a drink?' It was Edward he smiled at, who said, 'I think I ought to get Doris home.'

To his surprise Doris did not object. The last thing Mme Tisserant said, holding Doris greedily with her eyes, was, 'Don't lose the card, my dear. And remember, Monday at noon.'

'Forget? Likely, ain't it? Ta-ta, and thanks ever so.'

Out in the street and on their way to the St. James's Square car-park, Doris took Edward's arm and said, 'Gord, I'm all excited, What luck, eh?'

'You stick to me and there's no knowing how far you'll go. Together, we're going places.'

'Four quid a week! My dad on'y gets fifty bob when he's in work, which ain't often.'

'My turn next,' Edward said, deliberately wistful, to attract her sympathetic attention and suggest that each should rejoice in the other's strokes of luck and sympathize when such luck was not forthcoming. Doris said, 'An' nothing to do for it but wear clo'es. Dunno as I'd want to go to Paris, though. New York'd be something, though. Might get to 'Ollywood, I shouldn't wonder.'

They got into the car. Edward kissed her and she pushed him away. As he drove he let her talk and said nothing until, five minutes from the end of her street, she said, 'Cheerful, a'ncher?'

Like a fool he said he was afraid of losing her.

'Don' be silly! Much loss I'd be, I don' think!'

'This won't make any difference to Southend?' he implored.

'W'y should it? 'Course not. 'Ere, give us a kiss. No, that's enough, I'm that tired. 'Night. An' ta, ducks, it was lovely.'

4

IT must have been during the two harassing weeks before that Easter holiday, which did not turn out as Edward expected it to but sharply altered his course, that Mr. Pardoner, in concluding an argument, said, 'Life, Tillotson, is simply a series of accidents we have to adapt ourselves to.' It is said that there were times in the past when a man could have a plan for his life and carry it out. But this was not possible in Edward Tillotson's time, perhaps because the framework of all private lives is public life and the public life which contained his private life had been a long-dragged-out civil war. As Mr. Pardoner said to him, 'We have lived and we still live, Tillotson, as if the house were for ever catching fire in a new place whenever we sit down to our dinner.' Once, when Edward had said that the war in Spain (Spain simply happened to be where it was at its most acute at that moment), 'did not interest him', Mr. Pardoner said, 'But it will, Tillotson, it will. The streets of Madrid and Barcelona lead into the streets of London, though you can't see it on the map. Oh, it's confusing, I grant you, but only because the opposing sides aren't distributed geographically but economically and socially and temperamentally.'

'I don't follow you.'

'Do not be deceived by the differences in the shapes of Messrs. Hitler's and Chamberlain's moustaches.'

'Are you a Communist, then?'

'Are you a poll-parrot, Tillotson?'

The fact was, Edward could take no interest in anything but a single question: whether he would succeed in getting Doris, who was no longer working at Mendoza's and was so taken up with being prepared for her new job by Zenobie Tisserant that she had become inaccessible, to come to the party which his father had decided to give following a great stroke of fortune. His peace of mind had been wholly shattered by this change. Doris still refused to let him see her at home in her parents' lodgings, and to see her at all he had to leave his own work sharp at five, drive dangerously fast to Jermyn Street,

and hope to catch her as she came out of Dwyer et Tisserant's between half past five and six. Sometimes he missed her, she had already gone when he arrived fretting at the maddening delays imposed by rush-hour traffic. Or, although he was there in time, she could not come with him, had only time for a quick drink before some appointment only vaguely defined or because she had to go to Zenobie Tisserant's apartment on what sounded to Edward like the most improbable errands, a fitting, or lessons in deportment or elocution, as if they were not in the 1930s but in the 1830s.

Yet it was not these physical difficulties which most depressed and harrowed him, distracting his mind from everything but how to get hold of her, how to keep up with her. His real anguish rose from the nature of the change taking place in her and its extraordinary swiftness. That was as surprising as the change which takes place when a gardener moves a dormant plant into his hothouse. He still did not think Doris was clever: she did not learn with her mind, but as the lungs learn to breathe at birth, the legs to walk in infancy. Every time he saw her she was different, she was more than she had been, and also, in some ways, less; for example, less honest. Her speech corrected itself daily, hourly; her accent, her manners, her ways of moving, and at least superficially the furniture of her mind, were all new and all of superior quality. Should he have rejoiced? It would have seemed to him that whoever thought so had never been in love. Every change in her made it more difficult to force the objective Doris into coincidence with his Doris, the girl he had made and who obsessed him. She was less and less amenable to his amorous fancy, less and less subject to control by selfish adoration. In the simplicity of her crude original character there had been advantage for him if only because it imposed on her a kind of rude candour which was relatively easy to deal with. But now she was learning the little tricks of evasion in thought and deed and word, learning to value the luxury of mental privacy which is achieved by concealing the raw feelings under manners. He was no longer sure when she was pleased with him, and when displeased, nor even if she was ever more than indifferently friendly. She was becoming the sort of girl whom he would not have known how to approach; becoming what, had she always been so, would have put her out of his reach in the first place.

One evening she came hurrying out of the double plate-glass doors of Dwyer et Tisserant's (with a smile for the commissionaire which was already that of an old hand), wearing a new and very

smart suit. She got straight into the car and said, 'Take me for a drive.'

'Where?'

'I don't care.'

Edward thought she looked pale and unsure of herself but he said nothing, and as it was a fine evening decided to take her to Richmond. He had not much money in his pocket but they could have sandwiches and beer at a riverside pub. She remained silent and he had too much to do attending to the traffic to question her. Nor was he any longer at all sure of himself with her: he was beginning to be placatory. He knew from what he had read that he could do nothing worse than show timidity: he was assured by every master of the art of love that timidity invites the crushing blow of contempt or indifference from that member of a couple tied by love who, as the French say, 'lets herself (himself) be loved'. But knowledge of that kind cannot be acted upon.

However, when they were eating their sandwiches and drinking their beer and watching the river flow to the sea, a spectacle notoriously soothing to the spirit, he did at last say, 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing.'

'Something's upset you.'

She would not admit it for a long time; not until they were driving back to London did she suddenly begin to talk about it. Edward gathered then, with a surprise only slightly less than her own, that Mme Tisserant had, as the saying then was, made a pass at her. 'As if,' Doris said, outraged and yet amused, giggling, 'as if she was a man.'

Edward knew nothing about such conduct. He had in mind, under that heading, nothing but some newspaper comment on a book which had been banned some years before, and whose heroine had apparently been such a woman as Zenobie Tisserant. He had no doubt heard funny stories about such behaviour, but with no understanding of the implications. Mme Tisserant's 'pass' had put Doris out of her depth. Is female homosexuality an upper-class privilege? Certainly very few anomalies of sexual behaviour could have disturbed Doris, she had not been raised in a slum for nothing, and neither male homosexuality nor incest of various complicated kinds would have been new to her. But she had never, apparently, come across an instance of Zenobie Tisserant's sexual manners. Edward said, 'What did you do?'

'Give her a shove. I'd've smacked her face for her only I was that surprised.'

'What did she do?'

'Let me alone and went away. Later she came back and apologized. She said she didn't know what got into her. 'It better not get into you again,' I said. 'I promise it won't,' she said. Then she said she'd gimme a token—that's what she called it—to remind me of her promise. Look!'

Edward glanced away from the road for a moment as Doris shot her slender wrist clear of her cuff to display a tiny gold watch on a bracelet of flat gold links. He whistled. Doris said complacently, 'Bit of all right, isn't it?'

'What are you going to do?'

'What d'ye mean?'

'It's going to be awkward staying there, surely?'

'No. I can handle her and any more like her. People aren't 'alf queer, though. He's another.'

'He?'

'Custard-pie. That's what we call 'im in the fitting-room. The girls don't like him. There's advantages, though. He don't paw you about like the ordinary ones. But he's spiteful, a proper bitch at times.'

They were at Hammersmith Bridge when she said, 'Don't go the old way, I got something to show you. Go down by the river and along the Embankment.'

'What's all this?'

'Wait'n see.'

Just short of Charing Cross she said, 'Up there,' pointing to the bottom of Denham Street. It was narrow and made narrower by newspaper delivery vans parked all down one side. At the top a gigantic lorry was unloading goods into a popular restaurant basement and Edward managed to park behind it, as directed by Doris. She got out and led the way into a tall, narrow house which had been beautiful and was still elegant, although the white paint was flaking off the painted wooden fluted columns of the doorway, and its broken pediment. The narrow stairs were drugged. On the second floor Doris led him into a large room with two big windows over Denham Street and a door into a smaller room. It was carpeted and furnished with pieces which were certainly not Doris's. He had no time to begin questioning her; the door into the small room opened and a tall, very fair girl with cat's eyes came in and Doris said, 'This is Irma, Ted. We're sharing the rooms. We moved in yesterday. I'n't it lovely?'

The fair girl ignored her and gave Edward a slight, grave bow and said, 'Varyatinski' or something of the sort. He supposed that it was her name and since he could hardly say nothing said, 'Tillotson', also with a small bow. Doris giggled and said, 'You two! You're a scream!'

Edward did not feel like a scream: he had never been allowed into Doris's parents' house but he had grown used to the evil of not knowing what it was like nor what she did in it nor who else lived in it. To be familiar with an anguish is to forget that it is one; it becomes assimilated to the generalized sense of uneasiness and ceases to be specific and acute. He did not know what he was jealous of in Holloway, but whatever it was he was used to it, as people grow used to arthritic pains or harassing debts. And now Doris had escaped from that bearable unknown to a new one in which all London was open to her and could come to her. 'You might've told me,' was all he said.

'Is Mr. Tillotson coming to our house-warming, Dot?' Miss Varyatinski said. Doris admired her while Edward absorbed the new pain of hearing her called Dot with all that it implied of an intimate life utterly unknown to him, the life of the fitting-room where the girls must trail and sit about half-dressed and undressed, knowing each other as he would never know Doris. Doris said, 'Bit of all right, i'n't she? She's a princess; did I tell you that? Princess Varyatinski . . . did I say it right, duck?'

'Really, Dot, you're impossible!'

'What house-warming is this?' Edward said, made anxious by the fact that Doris had not even mentioned a party.

'I was going to ask you tonight,' she said. 'It's Wednesday.'

'But good God!' he said, and he could not have been more stricken if told that his father and Maud had just died in an accident of peculiar frightfulness, 'that's the day of our party and you promised to come.'

She had, of course: and the occasion loomed enormous to Edward because he had decided that he must then do the thing which had come into his mind as his only hope when, at dinner in *Flaubert's*, he suddenly realized that he had played her away into Mme Tisserant's hands: he was going to ask her to marry him. Doris clapped the back of her hand to her mouth and stared at him in theatrical consternation. But it was the princess who saw the pain in his face and said, 'There's no harm done. We can change our date easily enough.'

'That's right, we can,' Doris said, and to him, 'I forgot.'

'I suppose you forgot about Easter, too,' he said bitterly, only partly relieved by the concession.

'You've no call to say that. On'y I was going to make a new suggestion.'

'What? What suggestion?' he urged her anxiously.

'Changing the place.'

'Where to?'

'I dunno. Couldn't we just drive somewhere an' stay where we liked?'

'I suppose so, if that's what you'd like.'

It was more evidence of change in her, of a new standard of taste. And Edward, who had given in very reluctantly to her in the matter of Southend and detested the idea, now gave up that watering-place with even more reluctance and a heavy sense of loss and a premonition of further misfortune.

Twice that week he had got home to find telephone messages, garbled by Maud's daily woman and by herself, from Custer-Dwyer. ('*A major something, it sounded like Cuspidor, wants you to phone him.*') There was a third that night, this time with the addition 'urgent'. Edward had ignored the other two messages but now it suddenly occurred to him that the major had partial control of Doris's life, and that his business with him might even concern her directly. He telephoned the major's number.

'You've taken your time,' Custer-Dwyer said, in the bluff-and-soldierly of his two manners.

'Sorry,' Edward said, sulkily, offering no excuse.

'Well, never mind. When can you come and see me?'

'I didn't know you'd asked me.'

The major's manner changed a shade, touched on archness, suggested what he hoped for, as he said, 'Don't you be coquettish with me, young man! The fact is, Tillotson, we've managed to do something as you know, for your little friend Doris and now we'd like to do something for you.'

Edward did not know what to say: he could have said, 'Why?' but in the end said that it was very kind of him. Custer-Dwyer said, 'Yes, you'll find that I'm a very kind man. I'd hoped to fix a date for this evening but it's too late for that now and I go to Paris tomorrow. I shall be there over Easter, but I'll phone you again when I get back.'

A few days before the party Mr. Pardoner, who had refused Edward's invitation to come, put his head out of his office door and

said, 'David Mendoza rang while you were on the outside phone. You're to report to his office at once.'

'What for?' Edward said, trying to imply that it must be something to do with business, that it could not be for private reasons.

'If you don't know, Tillotson, I certainly don't.'

Edward was so used to going to David's office that it had ceased to have the invisible but powerful guardian of director-prestige before the door. So that when he reached it he knocked but walked in without waiting or looking at the tell-tale light above it. There was a man in the room and although he had his back to the door, for he was standing looking out of the window, Edward saw at once that it was not David. This man was old and had white hair. Edward had closed the door behind him or he would have backed out at once. As it was the man turned round sharply and looked at him. Edward recognized him as David's father, the head of the firm and of a score of other firms: his face was long and very lean, dead white but with some curious stains on the skin, like large numbers of freckles run together into brown masses. He had thin white hair, a short, pointed white beard and bright blue eyes. The distinction of his face was slightly marred by the crookedness of the nose, which looked as if it had been broken and reset badly about half-way down, so that it pointed a little to one side. It gave a touch of slyness to an otherwise noble countenance. He looked at Edward and said, 'Well?'

'Mr. David sent for me, sir.'

'Who are you?'

'Tillotson, sir, Mr. Pardoner's assistant in the Gifts Department.'

'What did Mr. David want you for?'

'I don't know, sir.'

But Edward did know that none of the work David did for the firm had anything whatever to do with the Gifts Department. And just as he had felt irrationally guilty in the presence of David's mother, so now, confronted with his father, he had the same feelings that somehow he had injured this man. Yet there was nothing he had to reproach himself with, although it was exactly as if, for some reason quite beyond his ken, he had fallen under suspicion of evil-doing. The old man had turned away from him and was again looking out of the window although there was nothing to see but a blank wall of yellow brick. Over his shoulder he said, 'How old are you, Tillotson?'

Edward told him.

'How long have you been here?'

He told him that, too.

'I see. My son will be back in a minute, he has gone to my office for me. You know him already, no doubt?'

It occurred to Edward to say that he had happened to be on hand when Mr. David had some trouble with his car in the firm's car-park and that he had been able to put it right for him. While he was saying this it seemed to Edward that the shadow over Mr. Mendoza's face lightened a little. But as, in the succeeding silence, the old man stared at Edward's face, the darkness returned to his own and Edward became so uneasy that he found courage to speak and said, 'Perhaps I should come back later, sir.'

'Very well. I will tell Mr. David to let you know when he is ready for you.'

Edward had been back at his desk half an hour before the house phone rang and David said, breathlessly, as if his room were besieged by enemies, 'Don't come up here. Meet me in the private bar of the Nag at quarter to one and we'll go to Soho for lunch. I'll square it with Pardonier if we're late.'

'Well, all right,' Edward said. He resented his own sense of guilt; he disliked the conspiratorial atmosphere when, as far as he knew, there was no conspiracy.

When Edward walked into the bar David was there already and had a drink ready for him. He said, 'Drink it up and let's get out of here.' His face was white and strained and he looked quite old. Out in the street and before they were even in the car David said, 'What did my father say to you?'

'Nothing. Asked who I was and how long I'd been with the firm and so on. Does it matter?'

'It's absurd, but he doesn't think it right for me to be friends with . . . oh, well, a junior member of the staff. He thinks it will give rise to . . . sort of ideas of favouritism.'

'Maybe he's right.'

'Rubbish! It's precisely that sort of thing, I mean his attitude to us, which makes . . . forgive me . . . for bad labour relations as the ghastly phrase is. It made me extremely angry and I damn' well showed it and said what I thought.'

He went on with that theme: it seemed to Edward that the anger which his friend was supposed to have felt and expressed was spurious. There was a shrillness and hollowness in David's protestations so disagreeable that at last, but before he showed any sign

of making an end of it, Edward said, 'Well, let's forget it, David. Look, my father is giving a party on Wednesday next week. He's just sold some film-rights and wants to celebrate. Will you come?'

'Rather! I should love to. I say, how very nice of you to ask me.'

'Why? Naturally, I ask you. Only one thing, Doris will be there.'

'Oh. Will she? Next Wednesday you said?'

'Yes. Why? What do you mean?'

'Mean?'

'You were going to say something about Doris being there.'

'No.'

Edward knew he was lying and refused to say any more, and his face must have been anxious and sullen, because when David had parked the car and they were going into the restaurant he said, 'Look, do cheer up, Edward, you've got a face as long as a fiddle. What's the matter?'

'You know something about Doris coming to our party. I want to know what it is.'

David said nothing until they were seated at a table and then, by way of comment on Edward's scowl, said, 'Oh, God! Well all right, look, it's absolutely nothing definite and I'm practically certain to have got it all wrong because I wasn't listening carefully, but'—he gave a curious little petulant shrug as if he was being made to confess under duress—'I was at the same party as Custer-Dwyer last night and he happened to say that he and Tisserant were going to Paris and taking their new model-girl with them and wouldn't be back till after Easter. I thought after what you'd told me last week that he must mean Doris. I expect I've got it all wrong and that they've got another new model-girl, I . . .'

Edward did not hear the rest. He and David had been to that restaurant before and he knew where the telephone was. His hands were shaking so that it took longer than it should have done to find Dwyer et Tisserant in the book. The telephone was fixed to the wall and open to the room, not private, but he did not care, he was alone with his misery. A girl's voice said, 'Dwyer et Tisserant, good morning.' Edward asked for Doris and the girl repeated her name and said, 'I'm sorry, she's not here.'

'Gone to lunch?' Edward said, desperately hopeful.

'No, to Paris.'

He did not say thank you. He hung up the phone and crossed the restaurant and went out into the street and started walking. He was confused. He had some curious and rather terrible visions of cruelty

which made him walk very fast and be keenly aware of the hardness of the pavement under his feet and the ring of his heels on it; but who was the victim of his tortures? Custer-Dwyer, Doris, perhaps even David? And he had strange visions of power which made him clench his fists and become aware of his finger-nails biting into his palms, with a kind of pleasure. What persisted, after his self had relaxed its agonizing grip on him, was physical disappointment, frustration experienced in advance: he was not to 'have' Doris at Easter.

He forgot that the Sunbeam was in the car-park at the factory; it never even occurred to him to go back to the office. He went on walking up the Tottenham Court Road, past vast furniture shops with windows full of lino cylinders like groves of stylized tree trunks; past sleazy cinemas and eating-hells, and so up the Hampstead Road and all as if he knew where he was going, but he didn't; had a purpose, but he hadn't. Something in him must have known though, and had a purpose, but it was never explained to him. Why was it in Overbury Park that Edward came back to the immediate present, recovered himself from the strange and terrible world of cruelty and power beside the still-standing enclosure where the kangaroo had lived? He was calmer, cooler, more quietly dejected. An old man in a brown trilby hat bearing a park-keeper's badge came slowly towards him carefully sweeping the already clean path with a birch besom. Edward said, 'Didn't there used to be a kangaroo here?' and the park-keeper said, 'Yes, but it died.'

* * *

David got to the Tillotson's for the party after most of the other guests were already there. Edward observed something odd in the way his father received David, but he could not have said exactly what it was; a little as if David were a revelation to him, the solution to a problem. But, with the overwhelming heartiness which was part of his social manner but never otherwise apparent in him, Mr. Tillotson said, 'So you're David Mendoza. My son has told us a great deal about you. I am delighted you could come, delighted!' There was a certain grandeur in his manner which ignored the shabbiness of the old Turkey carpet, the tinge of yellow in the too-often-washed Nottingham lace curtains, the lumpily salient springs of the arm-chairs. It attempted, not altogether successfully, to create a more worthy setting for the new suit Mr. Tillotson had bought himself, and the burr-walnut radiogram to which he drew attention by saying that he liked a bit of music. This machine, which changed

its own records, was playing *In a Monastery Garden* as if to vindicate Mr. Tillotson's claim; to Edward it seemed an injudicious choice for a party; it lacked cheerfulness. But he was struck by a note which he had detected, underlying what his father said to David, a note of sudden understanding as if he were saying to David, 'Oh, so you're the answer, are you?' Answer to what?

David said nothing about Edward's behaviour in the restaurant nor did he remark on Doris's absence. 'Tell me who everyone is,' he said, looking round the room with a kind of theatrical eagerness as if all the guests were very interesting and distinguished people, and putting a shine on his eyes to express pleasure in his company. He fixed his attention on Mr. and Mrs. Blakely from next door who stood, rather glumly, she in a pink knitted sweater and a skirt which hung unevenly, watching the radiogram change *In a Monastery Garden* for *Trees* with a series of jerky, insect-like motions and clicks, and then smiling their admiration for its cleverness into each other's eyes.

A long table had been covered with Maud's largest white cloth of which she used to say that you couldn't get damask like that nowadays, and provided with enough bottles and glasses and plates of canapés, sandwiches and *petit fours* to make a respectable showing.

'Come and get a drink,' Edward said to David, 'I don't know most of these people. Some are neighbours and some are friends of Father's in his work.'

They pushed their way through the crowd of pairs and trios who stood holding plate and glass and all talking brightly and showing their teeth in smiles. At the buffet Maud was pouring out lemonade for an elderly, slack-faced man with a spurious air of distinction conferred by a fine head of white hair; she was suggesting things for him to put on his plate, and he was saying, 'Nothing intoxicating, please, just lemonade.'

Maud fastened on David and Edward as soon as they appeared. 'You have not met Mr. Woodreeve, Edward? Mr. Woodreeve, this is Edward, the son of the house. And Mr. David Mendoza.'

Mr. Woodreeve was secretary of the Overbury Park W.E.T.S., Workers Educational Tourism Society. He had soft and fleshy hands and immediately told them he was a linotype operator and went on at once to say that he had been telling Mrs. Olantigh here that when he was a youth not yet out of his time, 'comps' had gone to their work in top-hats.

'Yes,' Maud chipped in, all glowing with wide-eyed pleasure in

anything so pleasantly surprising, 'and in Mr. Woodreeve's indentures there's a clause saying that his master isn't to give him salmon for dinner more than three times a week! Now isn't that extraordinary?'

'Mind you,' Mr. Woodreeve reassured them, 'it was old-fashioned stuff. Just got left in the standard form from the old days, there wasn't any salmon in the Thames then.'

Maud had been giving a short series of lectures to his Society, which was affiliated to the Overbury Park Co-op. He, his Society, the Labour Party branch of which he was likewise an officer, all belonged beyond the railway in Overbury Park South. He said, 'Mrs. Olantigh's lectures have been most successful.' He looked at her and went on, 'To 'ave lived in Venice, Verona and such . . .' He shook his head and raised his eyes like a clergyman in silent prayer and then went on, 'And yet I always say what's the matter with England, it's good enough for me. Ah, the old country takes a lot of beating and I've never bin out of it myself.'

'Your educational tourism has been done at home, sir?' David said.

'That's it. Take Canterbury Cathedral, now. Are you telling me you can do better than that in France?'

He had not so much the lively cockney speech as a London sloppiness of accent, the slurred consonants, meagre vowel sounds and glottal stop, without the wit. Under his skin there was a faint tinge of yellow which made him look ill. The next time Edward attended to him he was telling David in what state the Spanish war was ending. Edward did not think Mr. Woodreeve's opinion perfectly clear. His head was shaken but the significance of the shake remained open to interpretation. David, making talk, said it looked like a triumph for Fascism and a smack in our eye.

'We've gotta keep our 'eads. Nobody's going to tell me the Government side didn't spoil their case with some queer friends. I'm Labour as I dessay you know, but I don't know as you can blame the Tories for non-intervening. It wasn't to be expected we should take up with Communists and anarchists and that. I c'n tell you between you 'n' I 'n' the gatepost, Major Attlee didn' like what he saw w'en he went over.'

Trying to strike a more frivolous, a more convivial note, David said, 'So, you stick to soft drinks, Mr. Woodreeve?'

'Alwis 'ave. An' you young men c'd do worse'n follow my example. I don' say but an occasional glass of beer, but there's no danger to a

young man like social drinkin'. The way I look at it, it's unnecessary. Unnecessary, that's what it is.' And he began to tell them about Dr. Joshua Seligman who had lectured to his Society, had come from Oxford specially, a man with a giant brain, a great intellect as everyone knew, and never touched alcohol. 'Mind you, I don't go all the way with 'im. F'rinstance, he don't eat meat nor anything cooked. Fruit an' chopped cabbage mainly, an' 'olemeal bread. Very 'olesome I dessay, but not much variety.' Dr. Seligman had experimented with alcohol on guinea-pigs, giving some alcohol and others milk. The alcoholic guinea-pigs had a lower birth-rate and died young. David murmured something about the doctor having proved that alcohol was not good for guinea-pigs. Edward was seized by a fit of coughing but Mr. Woodreeve had no idea that the remark was anything but innocent and explained at length that what was bad for guinea-pigs was bad for people. He was still doing so as, like everyone else, they turned towards the door, prompted by the stir and mutter which marked an arrival of the first importance. Mr. Reuben Lipschitz had told Mr. Tillotson that he would 'look in for a moment'. He had done so, but took the gilt off the gingerbread of this condescension by immediately explaining that, a great soccer fan, he had been quite near the house at Tottenham, seeing High-bury play Manchester United.

Mr. Tillotson was a very much taller and bigger man than Mr. Lipschitz, yet such is the radiant energy of success and power that the distinguished guest had the air of taking up much more room. He was not more than five feet three inches tall and had one of those apparently boneless noses of no particular shape above a scrubby little moustache. What the shaving-soap advertisements called five o'clock shadow, moreover, darkened his plump little jowls. But the unimpressive details were easily forgotten in the bright quickness of black, darting, lively eyes magnified rather than hidden by thick lenses and enjoying a life which seemed independent of the rest of his face.

'What a game!' he was saying, or rather proclaiming, as Edward pushed his way through the court which had formed about him, carrying the whisky and soda his father had signalled for. Mr. Lipschitz took the drink with a nod, and went on, exclamatory, 'Like a machine in goal, that McQwown, like a windmill!' He swallowed his whisky, put the empty glass into the nearest hand with the complete confidence of a man used to service, and began to wave his arms about excitedly and to make quick, stiff-legged

little jumps from side to side, in imitation of the great Mancunian goalkeeper. Everyone watched him solemnly.

Mr. Tillotson, meanwhile, was slowly, with little shoves and motions of the hands, urging him towards the buffet. Edward backed away from in front of him and most of the guests moved in unison behind him. A slow tide overwhelmed those who had remained standing about between the door and the buffet, and washed up round David and Mr. Woodreeve saying, ' . . . I said to Dr. Tawney, I said, look 'ere, I'm a plain working man and what edjucation I've got I got for meself, and what you Oxford and Cambridge fellas've got to realize . . . ' Edward lost the nature of the instruction Mr. Woodreeve had given to Dr. Tawney in listening to Mr. Lipschitz saying that he knew the result of every football match in advance, including the exact number of goals scored on both sides. He was, he said, psychic. Psychic, he added, in no ordinary sense, and he turned his back on the table from which he had taken nothing, to face his audience and say, 'There'll be a message soon, a message for all of you, for the whole suffering world. I'm not boasting. I don't know why I was chosen as an instrument. But I was. You can laugh if you like. That's O.K. by me, I can wait.' Nobody did laugh. And it came into Edward's mind that if it were true, if such a man had a 'message' he must use such means of expression as he had, he would not use a noble language, but his own; it might be vulgar, lame in manner, the matter might still be true. Mr. Tillotson, with no sense of congruity, said, 'Do have a sandwich, Reuben,' and the little man turned to look at the buffet with an expression of slight distaste and said, 'I only eat kosher, you know that.'

It embarrassed Edward so that he actually blushed, because of his special feelings about Jewish peculiarities. Maud said, 'The egg sandwiches, then.' Mr. Lipschitz took one and, again doing his Ancient Mariner act with his glittering eyes, said, 'Because being psychic'—he put half the sandwich into his mouth and talked with his mouth full, spluttering crumbs of egg and bread—'doesn't mean a man should turn from the religion of his ancestors. I'm a busy man. I work eighteen hours a day, well, you have to, to keep up nowadays what with the Yanks and the French, but there hasn't been a morning when I haven't put on the phylacteries my father gave me, that he had from his father, and him from his father before him, and said my prayers. Thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand . . . that's what it says, and I don't care what a man is, Jew, C. of E., Catholic, or Moslem, let him be it, that's what I say.'

Edward had the sense to see that it was this, this candour in his convictions and in his enthusiasms, which had made this small and ugly man more powerful than everyone else in the room put together. It was an extraordinary thing to hear these pronouncements in the accents of a Berwick Street tout—accents and mannerisms which his training and frequentations in film finance and big business had done nothing to soften; it was embarrassing; but it was not particularly funny and only David was amused rather than impressed. Edward heard Mr. Woodreeve behind him saying that he was an Agnostic himself and always said that you ought to respect other people's opinions. A man named Carpenter, a friend of Mr. Tillotson's who wrote short stories for a living and had published an unsuccessful novel, said that if *he* could know the results of football matches in advance he would do the pools and be a millionaire by now.

'You think I haven't thought of that? Do you take me for a *schlemil*!' Mr. Lipschitz turned on him quite angrily, then shook his head violently and explained, 'It wouldn't be playing the game, it wouldn't be right.'

The coagulation of guests about the man of power broke up again into unattached particles. There was a moment when David and Mr. Woodreeve and Edward stood separated from Mr. Lipschitz only by Maud and Mr. Tillotson, but Mr. Tillotson made no move to introduce his two rich men to each other, and David, turning his back on them, said, 'My father knows this fellow, though I've never met him. I gather he's the sharpest tax-evasion expert in the country, and gives advice on it, although only as an amateur.' That, too, was confirmed as one of the attributes of this many-sided man when, a little later in the evening, Edward overheard him talking to Carpenter, who had recently succeeded in selling a story to *The Saturday Evening Post* and had received tentative inquiries about it from an American film producer: there was a possibility of selling the film-rights. He must have told Mr. Lipschitz about it, for that magnate was saying, '. . . you do as I tell you and you won't pay any tax at all, not to anybody, our lot or their lot. Listen, you form an incorporated company in Puerto Rico, see? Right. You sell all your rights in this property of yours to the company for, say, a thousand dollars. That's a capital transaction and you don't pay tax on it, but if they try to collect on it, tax on two hundred quid, you should worry! You pay and say nothing. Right. So then this company, which is you of course, in Puerto Rico, collects the payment for

rights and . . .' Edward did not hear the rest; a black pall of mortal boredom descended on him when the subject under discussion was other people's money. Obviously, Reuben Lipschitz was not like that, he was interested in money 'platonically'. But in any case there was a violent diversion almost immediately after Edward's attention had flagged, a swirl and eddy away from Mr. Lipschitz and towards Mr. Woodreeve who had drawn attention to himself by suddenly buckling at the knees and collapsing in a dead faint on the floor. Edward heard David say, 'People shouldn't drink lemonade,' as he followed Maud through the ring forming about the fallen man and helped her to straighten him out and raise his head. She knelt beside him and looked round distractedly and said, 'What on earth's happened to him? This is awful! Edward, find your father and tell him to ring Dr. Sercombe at once . . .'

'Don't you do it, boy,' Edward heard Mr. Lipschitz's voice and turned round to find him just behind. 'Doctors don't know anything. I cured mine of fibrositis by the laying on of hands.' He said that it wasn't him, he took no credit, it was a power which used him, and without a trace of self-consciousness or anything but genuine concern he knelt beside Mr. Woodreeve's unconscious form, pushed Maud out of the way, got his little knees astride the sick man's big body, and, like an Arab making obeisance towards Mecca at the summons of the muezzin, bowed himself down until his forehead touched his unconscious patient's and remained in that attitude for at least a minute. Nobody said or did anything. They all looked away from each other. Edward saw David make a quick, impatient move and he saw his father, who had reappeared, put up his hand to check him. It was Mrs. Blakely, whose son was a medical student, who, perhaps outraged by this abracadabra, said, 'I really think a doctor . . .' but at that moment Mr. Woodreeve stirred and groaned and Mr. Lipschitz, spry as an acrobat, was instantly on his pointed little feet. Mr. Woodreeve sat up, supported again by Maud. Mr. Lipschitz said, 'It's the ichor.'

David, puzzled, said, 'The what?'

'The ichor, the life-fluid. It's what they call afflatus. It flows from me to him. Know what I feel like now? Like a car battery that's been run down. Flat!'

Maud said, 'Edward, Mr. Woodreeve would like to go home. You'd better get your car and take him. It's only under the tunnel and into Overbury Park Road.'

The tunnel was what joined the South to the North of Overbury

Park for vehicles, as the iron bridge joined them for foot passengers. Glad to get out Edward made for the door as willing hands began to raise the stricken man, now babbling a little. David caught Edward at the house door and went with him to get the Sunbeam round to the front of the house. He said, 'Whatever happened to the old bore?'

'I've no idea. It struck me that he doesn't look very healthy.'

'Look, Edward, I think I'll go now if you don't mind. Please say my thank-yous and good-nights to your father and Mrs. Olantigh.'

'Wait till I get back. I shan't be long. Though it's boring for you.'

'It isn't that, but I think your father's taken against me.'

'You're imagining things.'

'No, honestly. Distinctly rebarbative in his manner, I assure you.'

'Well, all right. I'll see you tomorrow.'

'Look, Edward, what are you doing for Easter?'

'I don't know. It depends on Doris.'

'But I thought . . .'

'I know,' Edward interrupted hastily, 'but I think she'll be back.'

David had been walking by Edward's side. They had reached the car. As Edward got in and switched on the lights he had a glimpse of his friend's face in the pale glim reflected off the road surface. There was a pitiful plea in its whiteness which infuriated him. And when, with exasperating gentleness, David said, 'She won't, you know,' Edward, having just started the engine, put his foot hard down on the accelerator (the '*exhiliarator*' as Doris, perfectly seriously, called it, with no idea that this was an error, much less that it was a very apt one), so that the noise made any further exchanges impossible. Of course, Edward knew that Doris would not be back; but, after all, she *might*, provided nobody put the certainty that she would not into words. He leaned across and opened the passenger door. David looked at him, then turned away and started to walk towards the place where he had parked his own car. Edward overtook him and stopped and opened the door again and shouted at him to stop being a bloody fool and to get in. At that David began to run, and Edward gave it up and was obliged to forget him anyway as he drew up before the front door and saw it open and his father and Maud, supporting Mr. Woodreeve between them, come slowly down the steps.

As they put Mr. Woodreeve into the car, he kept on repeating his apologies. 'Just a bit of a turn, you know, just a bit of a turn.' To Edward, Maud said, 'Should I come with you?' He said no, Mr. Woodreeve seemed all right, and he could manage, and turned round

to look at his passenger, dumped like a big sack in the back seat, and to ask, 'What number?'

'Fourteen, Overbury Park Road,' Mr. Woodreeve said. Fourteen Overbury Park Road; it was new, unfamiliar to Edward, meant nothing at all. It was a designation of place shortly to be more important to him than all the rest of the world's geography together. When they got there it was too dark for him to see what the road or the house were like and as he pulled up he said, 'You'd better let me explain to your family.' But Mr. Woodreeve was already grunting his way out of the car looking, at least by the yellow light of a street lamp, quite ghastly. Edward helped him up the steps—like his own, this house had steps and a semi-basement—and as Mr. Woodreeve stood on the top one, exhausted, not offering to get out a key, Edward rang the bell. He heard it buzz inside the house and almost at once a light came on in the hall, revealing the stained-glass panel in the door, depicting palms, yellow sand and blue sea. Then he was looking at a tall, fair-haired girl with big eyes in an oval face, who said, 'Father!'

'A bit of a turn,' the old man said again, and breaking away from Edward's supporting hand, stumped heavily into the hall and began slowly mounting the narrow staircase which continued it. A door opened, and a small thin woman whom Edward could not see properly came out into the hall and said, 'Alf . . . why, whatever . . .' Edward heard a last mumbled repetition of 'A bit of a turn,' and louder, 'No fuss, now, Jenny!' The girl was saying, 'It was very good of you to bring my father home. He's never been taken ill when he was out before.' There was that in her way of saying it which suggested that it was about the only thing he had not done to earn her disapproval; that anything was to be expected of him. Edward noticed that her speech was whole, not mutilated like her father's. He said, 'Oh, not at all. Glad to help. Hope he'll be O.K. I must go back now.'

'Then I won't ask you in,' the girl said.

Her face did not make much impression on him, or if it did the impact was delayed. Even had he dwelt on it as he drove home, instead of thinking with impatience about David's hysterical conduct, any image he might have borne in his mind of her shining head against that dark and narrow hall, against the small dry figure of the woman he took to be her mother, against the massive clumsiness of her father's boots and trouser ends slowly mounting the stairs behind her, would have been swept away by the storm which burst at home the moment the last guest had gone and Mr. Tillotson, turning from

shutting and bolting the front door, faced him in the narrow hall and, white with the anger he could at last release, said, 'I want to talk to you.'

Edward followed him into the front room where Maud was piling the broken meats and empty bottles of the party on to a tray. Mr. Tillotson said, 'All right, Maud,' dismissively, and she edged out of the room using the heavily laden tray as an object of attention so that she need not look at either of them. Mr. Tillotson, his face still white and curiously rigid, said, 'What sort of a creature are you?'

Edward did not know what he meant, why he was so angry and full of hate. But there was a generalized guilt in himself; he was never, then or later, capable of righteousness. Something—that taint of Dreyfus?—put him for ever slightly in the wrong. Not in innocent surprise, then, but defensively, he said, 'I don't know what this is about.'

'Either you're a fool,' his father said, 'or you're something much worse. A nice choice for a father to have to make, isn't it?' And as Edward continued to look at him in what had the air of guilt-stricken sulkiness, Mr. Tillotson suddenly shouted at him with extraordinary and terrifying violence, 'How dare you bring that—that *sodomite* into my house?'

Even had Edward brought more than one friend to the house, creating a problem in identification, he would have had no hesitation in recognizing David. He would have known who his father meant, rather as if he had long been saying to himself (but he hadn't), that there was surely something wrong with David, something he ought to be ashamed of. All the same, he did not know what it was and there was as much curiosity as anger in his 'What on earth do you mean?'

'If you really don't know then God help you. You're not a child any longer. And if you do then don't try to bluff and lie to me. I don't suppose I can stop you choosing the rottenest kind of friends if that's the sort of man you are, but I'll thank you not to bring your pansy-boys in here, understand?'

There was no sense of surprise in Edward, nor impulse to indignant denial, nor move to defend his friend. He was suddenly in an agony of embarrassment. He muttered something about 'not having realized'. That hangdog conduct and, no doubt, his expression, lowered his father's tone. Mr. Tillotson was a kind man at heart: it was more in sorrow than in anger that he said, 'But Edward, you *should* have realized. Can't you see what a shock it was to me?'

What was I to think? Either that you, my son, were one of them—I'd rather have seen you dead!—or that you thought because he's rich it was worth overlooking the disgust any normal man must feel.'

Edward tried to be sure that now, enlightened, he was feeling disgust. And as his father went on talking about what the normal man 'must feel' about David and his kind, Edward found himself substituting Custer-Dwyer for David as the object of this lesson. He could not trust himself to feel disgust with David, but Custer-Dwyer was quite another matter. He did not resist his father's arguments or find them unconvincing: he did not deny the soundness of his criteria but simply found them hard to live up to. Edward supposed that there was a weakness in him; in some way he, too, was a little on the disgusting side of the barricade. He did not know in what manner he fell short of his father's normal man, but that he did so was as clear to him as if some muscle in his body had suddenly let him down. And seeing Edward defenceless and stricken rather than defiant, his father became gentle.

'I'm sorry I spoke so angrily. I was very upset. I think perhaps you didn't understand, which means there's no harm done, especially as you do understand now. It was natural enough for you to feel flattered. I suppose the young man's a millionaire? God knows, I'm sorry for his parents!' (The tragic mask of Mrs. Mendoza's face appeared to Edward.) 'It's a lesson not to envy the rich, eh? I'm not going to order you not to see him again, Edward. I've no right to do that and in your job it would be impossible anyway. We must look out for something else. But you're on your guard now. Your own decent feelings will do the rest. I've always known your heart was in the right place. Anyone can come under a bad influence. I don't think this talk's been wasted, do you?'

Mr. Tillotson raised a hand and, suddenly less appallingly sincere, more aware of himself as *en scène*, he squeezed Edward's shoulder and made an exit. And it was true that his talk had not been wasted, it had achieved two things. It gave Edward a sense of conferring a favour by remaining David's friend; and it reinforced his resentment against Custer-Dwyer for taking Doris away from him. It became almost all right for him to take everything from David and give nothing; it became all right to fix his frustration on an individual. Edward's father had given him the gift of righteousness: the amount of damage he had done in that ten minutes of fatherly reproach and advice was almost incredible.

That was not quite the last Edward saw of his father that evening. As he was undressing he came into his room. Mr. Tillotson had not started to undress and he had a cheque in his hand. He put it down on Edward's dressing-table and said, 'Your hundred pounds. Don't spend it all on riotous living. Good night, old chap.'

No doubt about it, it was his night.

5

Two days before Good Friday Edward had a postcard of the Eiffel Tower from Doris: *Stuck in gay Paree for three weeks. Shall I be forgiven XXX Doris*. He was angry to the point of tears. Later, her *shall I be forgiven* and her three kisses were some consolation. He did not detect the enormous progress in her education which the postcard implied, nor even the false note. They were evidence of the great stride she had taken towards what is called sophistication. Only a few weeks before she would have been incapable of using a phrase which was empty: it would not have occurred to her.

Edward went to Goudhurst. It was the year which was dominated by the raucous clamour of Hitler's voice, by the symbol of Chamberlain's umbrella, by the city of Munich. No comets drew a flaming warning across the sky and no two-headed calves were born, yet portents were not wanting. There were strange tales of wild departures in diplomacy. Mr. Pardoner, for instance, was one of the people who believed that 'we' really had offered Germany danegeld to the extent of one thousand million pounds: it was, he said, the sort of thing we *would* do, 'And you might as well try to change the weather by a bribe, Tillotson. Yesterday I saw an old man bearing a hand-lettered sandwich-board proclaiming that the day of wrath was at hand. That fellow should be editor of *The Times*.'

He was irritated by Edward's indifference. When Edward said that, war or peace, there was nothing he could do about it, which was more or less what he had said himself, Mr. Pardoner became angry and said it was precisely that attitude which was making a general war certain. 'I don't think it is certain,' Edward said, 'it may happen and it may not, like rain tomorrow.'

That was what he felt about it: perhaps most people did. The gratitude felt towards Mr. Neville Chamberlain, who happened to be Prime Minister that year, was the gratitude Indians feel towards a

mahatma who fasts to end a drought or send down flood waters. Edward paid so little *reasonable* attention to the news that he could never afterwards remember whether the first famous, later considered infamous, Munich arrangement came before or after that Easter holiday. He had only a vague idea that it came much later in the year.

The country round Goudhurst and the little town itself looked unfamiliar from the driving seat of a car. The dangerous corner by the church and the steepness of the hill down into the centre of the town both surprised him. He knew them at walking pace, not driving pace. He went through without stopping and out on to the narrow road towards Curtisden Green. His Uncle Walter's holding lay off that road at the end of a long cinder-track which was apt to vanish under mud in wet weather. Just before he came to its corner and the crooked board with the pointing hand and the word *Tillotson's*, he saw a girl walking the verge, stepping in and out of the dry ditch as she picked primroses from under the hedge. He was driving slowly and she turned to stare. He recognized Eileen Figgis, although the change since he had last seen her was almost a transformation. She had grown several inches taller, her face had fined from round to oval, her body from sturdy to graceful. Unselfconsciously she held her primroses at the level of her mouth, inhaling their freshness as she watched him approach. He stopped the car and said, 'Hallo, Eileen.'

'Ted Tillotson, well I never!'

'Can I give you a lift?'

'I'm only going to the cottage.'

'Well, if you've got enough flowers, I'll drive you there.'

'It's outa your way.'

'I'm in no hurry, Eileen.'

Edward opened the door and Eileen got in. She did not say anything about the car. He asked after her parents. 'I keep house for Father, now. You didn't hear Mother passed on?'

'No. I'm very sorry, Eileen.'

'I dunno. She was alwis in pain at the last. The doctor said we'd got to think it was a happy release.'

She explained this as if the doctor's consolation had been some sort of official instruction filtering down to her through the bureaucracy.

'Of course. But you must miss her.'

'I dessay I do,' Eileen said, doubtfully. Her mother, resentful of Figgis's adoration of their daughter, had not been kind to her.

Edward remembered that, at the time when Eileen was initiating him into the pleasures of sex in the heart of the old, hollow, hazel hedge which marked one boundary of his uncle's land, Mrs. Figgis had been thought too hospitable to some of her gipsy relatives—they were 'travellers' rather than gipsies—who stayed at the cottage and made brutal fun of Figgis; and that Eileen had taken his part. He, Arthur Figgis, worked for the Council at stopping the roads from being eaten up by their verges, an eternal task. In all weathers he was out, a lonely, deliberate man, by many thought simple, if not an idiot, chopping, chopping at the encroaching grass and weeds, annually recovering the two inches of civilization which had gone back to nature, hedging, ditching and trimming. An odd man with an odd story: very tall, his huge bones visible, with a stumping gait, colourless eyes and hair, and very few words, he was almost illiterate. Yet he had been born to a certain rank in the community: the Figgises had been artisans and small land-owning farmers in the parish for at least a thousand years. Eileen said, 'Dad's got a better job now. He's gardener to the chap that's bought Mulberry Trees. Name of McFadden.'

'Good Lord,' Edward said, 'somebody bought it at last?'

'Yes, an' done it up nice, too.'

'Well, I'm glad your father's all right, Eilcen.'

'Yes. I've never known him so easy.'

'I'm glad.'

They had reached the cottage. Some of the desire Edward had been accumulating for Doris shifted to Eileen as she got out of the car, her long, brown legs reaching for the ground, the smallness of her waist apparent even in the old macintosh she wore.

'The pear-tree's grown,' he said, wondering if it would be possible to complete, in his four days of holiday, what she and he had started when they were still children. Together they looked at the trained pear-tree as if it were an object of the utmost interest, and watched each other out of the sides of their eyes. When his mother left him the cottage, Figgis planted a pear-tree to the windowless south wall. Each year, as the low lateral branches grew longer, he trained a pair of new vertical branches to grow up to the eaves from which hung the hay and feathers carried into the loft by nesting starlings and sparrows. The training and pruning of that tree was done with exquisite neatness and geometrical symmetry. In flower, as now it was, it made a crowded grid of cream-flushed white blossom against the old brick. Edward had stopped the engine and they could hear,

very faintly, the hum of wild bees carrying pollen to the tree from the huge old perry pear-tree which stood in one corner of the small garden, a head of millions of flowers.

'Yes, it's grown,' Eileen said and, 'Coming to the dance tonight, or are you too grand now?' glancing at the car.

'Cossenden?'

'That's right. In the old Toc-H hut.'

'I might come. Like me to?'

'Anyone c'n go that's got a shillin'.'

She went into the cottage with a nod. Edward turned the car and drove back to the cinder track which led to his uncle's house. It was a weather-board cube painted brown and roofed with Sussex tiles. The white-painted frames of the square windows gave it an albino look. There were no windows, however, on the side facing the road, and Walter Tillotson had used that expanse of bare white wall to convey a message which he had at heart, in shiny black sans-serif letters over a foot tall:

THE COMING OF THE LORD DRAWETH NIGH BE YE PREPARED

Edward's Aunt Sarah, although she had a respect for ordinary church religion, was ashamed of this. 'And besides,' she once complained to him, 'people think it's paid for, like those advertisements for newspapers you see painted on the sides of houses.' But it was not paid for, of course: her husband, like Mr. Reuben Lipschitz, thought that you ought to proclaim what you believe. And in course of time Mrs. Tillotson had ceased to notice the warning excepting during the week following its annual repainting, which Walter Tillotson did himself. Moreover, the black paint was a concession to her; he had wanted to do it in scarlet, the colour of danger and of divine love.

The house stood between the big free-range poultry field, dotted symmetrically with arks and coops, a wet meadow bounded by the hollow hazel-hedge of Edward's first sin, and the field of glass-houses with the tall brick chimney of the boiler furnace. There were two immensely tall bird-cherries in the hazel hedge, now beautiful and fragrant in flower, and an old, twisted wild plum-tree. Edward's aunt was in her small, suburban-looking front garden, watering seedlings. Year after year she grew scarlet salvia mixed with orange marigolds, which hideous combination confirmed the evidence of her interior decorating, that she was colour-blind. As Edward drew

up he watched her face eagerly for the welcome, the love which had been the rock of his childhood. It was there, unchanged like the rest of her. She kissed him and said, 'You grow as handsome as your grandfather, rest his soul, but handsome is as handsome does. So you didn't bring your young lady.'

'She couldn't come. You got my card?'

'Yes, and I'll not pretend I was sorry, for I'd rather have you to ourselves.'

Not for the first time it occurred to Edward that people get into the wrong bodies: it was one of the reasons he never really liked Charles Dickens. It was his aunt, tall and bony and long-faced, and moving with the awkward, powerful stride of a Light Sussex hen which has spotted a large worm, who had the fat woman's character, whereas his Uncle Walter, for all his spiritual leanness, was a roundish man, dumpy and with a spherical head. To see him sitting in his chair by the fire as he did when they went into the house, you would have said an easy-going, easy-laughing man. Edward, who knew him, was very surprised to find him in that posture during working hours, or would have been if his aunt had not halted before they came to the living-room door and explained, 'Your uncle's in there. He had a fainting fit last night, I had to cry before I could get him to take the morning off. It wasn't easy, I'm that out of practice at my age, but I squeezed a few tears in a good cause. His hand's bandaged, don't pass a remark or ask after it, now, there's a good lad.'

'What happened?'

'Up to his old tricks. And after he'd promised me, too. Men! There's nothing sillier than a man with a bee in his bonnet and if you ask me it's only a step to bats in his belfry.'

His old tricks: the explanation was enough for Edward. A book which his uncle, perhaps alone among his countrymen, still read, was Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. He read in it every night for at least a few minutes, but he did not read mechanically, the book still moved and disturbed him. One night, when Edward was about sixteen or perhaps a year younger, the three of them had been sitting round the fire during the Christmas holidays, an open canopied hearth it was, on which they could burn unsawn cord-wood up to four feet long. From time to time a log burnt through and collapsed, and the whole fire needed pushing together into the incandescent centre on its great heap of glowing ash. There were tongs to do it with. On this occasion Walter Tillotson put aside his Foxe and stared at the pulsing red of the hot charcoal for at least a minute

before he did anything. Then he went on his knees and started to pick up the burnt ends of wood and thrust them into the centre with his plump but calloused hands. He did it slowly and carefully and Edward watched him, and it seemed to him that he kept his hand lingering deliberately within the region of intolerable heat. At last Edward could bear it no longer and said, 'Good heavens, doesn't it burn?'

'Yes, it burns,' his uncle said, and Sarah Tillotson looked up from her needlework and said, 'Walter! You promised!'

He was looking at the back of his right hand, which was scarlet, partly cooked in fact, for the next day it was one huge blister and they had to have the doctor. He said, 'I'd no right to promise, but flesh is weak,' and rose and went out of the room. His wife watched him go with pain in her face but did not follow him at once. She said, 'It's them martyrs of his,' as if referring to a minor vice harmful to his health. Then she went after him to make him put butter on the burn. In time Edward came to understand what his uncle was doing: he was driven by the contrast between what the martyrs endured and the weakness of his own flesh in the face of pain, to 'test' himself. That was what Edward's aunt had meant when she referred to his 'old tricks'.

Walter Tillotson was soberly glad to see Edward and presently Mrs. Tillotson left them together in the ugly little room with its yellow and purple lightning-flash wallpaper, brown paint, old chintz curtains washed pale-pink and grey at the square sash-windows. Uncle Walter and Edward never had much to say to each other. If Uncle Walter talked it was usually about his endless war with the Egg and Tomato Board. It was a co-operative and because it would have been ruin not to join, he was a member, but against his conscience, any sort of combination being a sin. This spiritual objection was expressed in occasional breaches of rules, such as selling (usually at a loss) outside the co-operative or withholding the sum due from him as his share of the levy raised on members to finance the Board's bureaucracy. As to his other subject, religion, he rarely talked about it for long and then in a disconcertingly ejaculatory style. The reason for this, as Edward understood it, was that there could be no effective evangelism of people already christened. The most you could do was to warn them that the day of reckoning was at hand and that they would do well to look into their souls and see whether or not they were 'justified'. Not that you could be sure by just looking. And anyway you could not do anything about it, you were either justified or

you were not; works could accomplish nothing positive, although practical charity seemed to be some insurance against a vague danger of, as it were, de-justification. Edward never understood it properly. (Mr. McFadden, some time during the terrible week which followed, said it was a kind of seventeenth-century Scotch Calvinism. He would ask after Edward's uncle, whom he admired, by saying, 'How's our antinomian?' But Edward never found out what that meant.)

Obedying his aunt's instruction Edward said nothing about his uncle's bandaged hand, but no doubt he stared at it, for after a silence which was oppressive Uncle Walter raised it from his knee and said, 'Looking at this, boy?'

'A bad cut?' Edward said, although he knew perfectly well that Walter Tillotson never lied.

'No, it's a burn.' And staring into the fire, 'Your aunt says it's wicked folly. But how's a man to know himself unless by testing, Edward? There's an inner conviction of justification, I know that of course. But we're all weaklings. There are doubts like stomach-ache. There's times I'm not *sure*. I'm not *tested*.'

Although Edward was quite fond of his uncle he always found his preoccupation with his future in the hereafter very repulsive. It seemed to him, although of course he never said so, extraordinarily selfish, like Christian abandoning his fellow-citizens to their damnation in order to save himself. He could not help wondering whether his uncle was indifferent or on the other hand despairing of his wife's fate and Edward's own; for he could not surely have believed *them* 'justified'. It was puzzling in so kind a man as Edward had always found him, despite his unhappy temper.

Edward's aunt came back into the room and with her, cheerfulness. He told her that he had seen Eileen Figgis and given the girl a lift and thought her very pretty. His aunt flushed faintly and said, 'You don't want to have nought to do with her, she's no better than a . . .' She did not complete the stricture because her husband, who on occasion lapsed into an archaic style owing to the nature of his reading, said, 'Woman! Bridle your tongue!' It was not that he was latitudinarian in matters of morality, of course; he knew poor Eileen was as damned as anyone can possibly be. But it was the sin close to hand that you had to check, in this case uncharity. Fortunately neither his wife nor his nephew took this kind of thing seriously: it was just Walter's way. Mrs. Tillotson said, 'Don't you take that tone with me, Walter Tillotson. Whatever next!' But it was mildly, almost absently said, and she went on, more vigorously, 'I'll

not see your brother's son walk into that hussy's lure and say nought!

Nought was one of the few dialect words she had left: she pronounced it *nowt*. Edward's aunt came from somewhere near Bolton and when he was little she still used to say things like '*happen it'll rain*', and to call him '*thou*'. But the meagre speech of Kent had slowly impoverished her English, he had not been '*thou'd*' for years and if she foresaw rain it was in the clumsier, '*It's probably going to rain*' of standard English. Edward loved her *nowt* and her occasionally colourful constructions because they were associated with the best thing in his childhood.

'You go to that dance if you want to,' she said, when he mentioned Eileen's suggestion, 'you're here to enjoy yourself, Teddy. But as for that young woman, don't say you haven't been warned.'

Poor Aunt Sarah! There was not much she could tell him about Eileen. And he heard her warning as a sort of promise renewed: he was not much inclined for dancing, but for a girl, yes. He had been promised Doris but another would have to do. There was a kind of spite in the idea; but that was his mood. He said, 'She told me Mulberry Trees is sold and her father gardener there.'

'That's right. A Mr. McFadden. Such a nice man though they say he writes for the papers. Figgis has fallen on those great feet of his there, he can't have hoped for such a place. 'Two pounds a week, they say, and him to have the selling of the surplus garden stuff. He won't know himself.'

At six o'clock they sat down to a tea of eggs and bread and butter and fried plaice, crumpets and honey. His uncle asked Edward to switch on the wireless; he did so but the set was dead. His aunt said it couldn't be the battery as she'd put the newly charged one from the garage in yesterday. Edward said he would look at the set after tea and in default of the news which his uncle liked to listen to as he ate, Aunt Sarah made conversation: she said her newspaper said there wouldn't be a war; and she wished she had Hitler, 'as he calls himself', where she could get at him. For Edward's aunt such phrases as 'as he calls himself' and 'so-called' were simply pejorative adjectives. Uncle Walter said that they had heard Hitler on the wireless one night and Aunt Sarah said, 'All that shouting! A man in his position, you'd think he'd know better.' Uncle Walter was not sure Hitler might not be right about the Jews, though, and looking up from his plaice, holding three chips impaled on his erect fork, 'The wounds the Jews inflicted on Him bleed yet, Edward,' he said, with a very

long face. Aunt Sarah said, 'It wasn't Jews, it was Roman soldiers as you very well know, Walter, and you've no call to speak so in front of the boy.'

For a moment Edward did not know what she meant but when he realized that she was referring to his mother's family, that is to say his grandfather Dreyfus, he flushed and muttered angrily something about it being all one to him; whereupon she shook her head and said that blood was thicker than water.

Edward took his last cup of tea over to the bamboo table in the window where the wireless stood, opened the set and stared at the circuit. The set was an old one and the circuit easy to follow. He found that a soldered joint to a valve anode had broken. His uncle always had excellent tools for all kinds of work: Edward borrowed a soldering iron and some flux and a blowlamp, and remade the joint. The wireless set worked after that, but the quality was very poor. Edward had nothing to do and to pass the time he sat down and drew a diagram of the whole circuit on a page torn from his aunt's household accounts book; then he pondered it, wondering how he might improve the quality of reproduction, although both his aunt and uncle said they thought it was fine.

Edward's idea that he might improve his uncle's wireless set was prompted, at least in part, by the final chapter of Pardoner on *The Mathematics of Alternating Currents*, a chapter in which the fact that the author was a musician became apparent. It dealt with a subject technically known as 'band-widths' but it concluded with some considerations, more speculative than didactic, on the relationship between audio-harmonics and electrical harmonics. Moreover, in another of the textbooks—Barton & Clough—with which Edward occupied a part of his leisure both in and out of the office, the question of the true reproduction of musical instrument harmonics, in electronics terms, had occupied his attention. It would be discourteous to trouble the reader with technicalities, which would be even more out of place here than, according to Stendhal, politics in a novel, which he compared to a pistol shot at a concert: nevertheless, so overwhelming was that few minutes' work with his uncle's wireless set on the course of Edward's life, that it is necessary to say something about it.

To analyse the origin of the changes in our lives, we need a biographical equivalent to the differential calculus: because Mr. Pardoner thought that no young man should be obliged to do the pointless and socially harmful work Edward was doing at Men-

doza's, he had persuaded him to study the mathematics of alternating currents; because music was his own passion he had talked about the mathematics of harmonics; because it was too early to set off for the dance; because Edward did not want to think about Doris; because he had always felt at peace and quite safe in his uncle's house; because the positive nature of his aunt's affection for him gave him confidence and a wish to shine in her eyes; because the flowers and scent of the two great bird-cherries were pleasant to him and reassuring; for these and countless other reasons of which he knew nothing, he was able, for an hour, to concentrate his whole attention on the small problem of his Uncle Walter's bad wireless set.

It is important not to give the impression that the small discovery, or rather innovation, which Edward made, was really important: his innovation could have been made at any moment by any one of thousands of electrical engineers, fitters or designers in the industry; that it was not is largely due to the rigidity which results from mass-production. Or it could have been made by any one of thousands of amateurs who made the construction of radio and television sets their hobby. Sooner or later someone would have hit upon the notion: it happened to be Edward, and the device became known in the business as the 'Tillotson feed-back', a much more efficient and self-adjusting combination of inductances, resistances and capacities for making use of established feed-back techniques. That evening, and at intervals during the night, at the dance, driving home, in bed, Edward worked the thing out in his head and on scraps of paper. There was a point, after he had left Eileen at her cottage—and if Figgis had not still been up and about she and Edward would have made love and he would have forgotten the whole thing—when it became what Mr. Pardoner had once recommended to him, day-dreaming to some purpose, a means of making himself important. Before leaving the subject, let it be repeated that there was nothing brilliant in his discovery, nothing calling for great insight or intuition or intellect, just momentarily very keen observation and a flash of luck. If nothing but the improvement of quality in sound reproduction had resulted, the Tillotson feed-back would never have become important, never have borne a name, his name; as it happened, the contrivance had a bearing on electronic pulse-shaping circuits: that is, on what nobody had then ever heard of: radar.

Edward left the house at about half past seven in daylight gently softening into gloaming. The tall masts of bird-cherry cooling the night with their whiteness, stood sharp against the green glow above

the declining sun. The evening smelt faintly of almonds. It occurred to him to stop at Eileen's to see if she had set off. Figgis was standing in his garden staring at his pear-tree, perhaps because he enjoyed the beauty of the blossom, more likely because it was his one achievement and its contemplation gratified him. The principal thing about Figgis, his distinction, was that he looked like a primitive, almost a prehistoric man. Not that he had an animal crouch or a salient brow-ridge or a flat nose. On the contrary, the great nose jutted from his bony, skull-like face under an intellectual-looking brow and between watery blue, candid eyes. No; there was a sort of unpolished, unfinished look about him, something, as it were, experimental, awkward, shambling; one could have understood it if God had decided to pull him to pieces and start again. Edward said, 'Good evening, Figgis.' Friendly, Figgis grunted and smiled. It did not occur to Edward to call him Mister Figgis, but the omission was not due to class distinction: he had been universally called Figgis since the memory of man runneth not the contrary. There was something about him which made Arthur, or any other familiar name, inappropriate. In fact he came to be called Figgis by all but his mother even in his own family. The old people said that his mother was the only person who had ever managed to be fond of Figgis, in her impatient, snappish way; she used to tell her young friend—who was now Mrs. Goldup-at-the-Plough and very old indeed—that though Arthur wasn't much of a scholar there was no harm in him only he was a bit slow-like. Whatever she might say it was a trial and a shame to the Figgises, who were known as the Figgises of Figgis Hill, to have a semi-idiot in the family. Artisan-smallholders for forty generations, they all had the same pallor, the same rotten teeth colourless eyes and pale tow hair; but the rest of them had all their wits.

'How are things?' Edward said. Figgis shook his head and said that they were 'No better'. Neither question nor answer had reference to his health or wealth, but to the only thing which closely engaged his attention besides Eileen, whom he adored in watchful and blind silence, and his pear-tree: an entirely imaginary lawsuit with his brother. It was Figgis's belief that when their father died he had left the 'Carpenters and Undertakers' half of the family business to the elder brother, as well as the house; but that he had left the family cherry orchard, twenty acres, to him, Arthur Figgis; and that his brother had 'made away with' the will. For years, despite his mother's assurances, and encouraged by the gipsy woman he had married, Figgis had believed this. From time to time, emerging from

his massive and ponderous tranquillity, he would go up to Figgis's Hill and make a scene of frightening, dull violence. It was his mother who, not long before she died and left him her only little bit of property, the cottage, found a means to quiet him and prevent his brother, a very angry and ill-natured man, from bringing the police into a family quarrel. She persuaded the solicitor who had charge of her own family's business to pretend that he had started a lawsuit to get Figgis his 'rights'. It became customary to ask him after the progress of this suit. Figgis was a patient man, he felt that something was being done, he understood, as if by inheritance, that the law's delays might easily exceed a man's lifetime. It was long since he had gone up to the family holding and abused his brother and told him, as he told everyone in the public bar of the Plough, that he would get no good of his cheating.

While Figgis and Edward exchanged civilities Eileen came round from behind the back of the house pushing her old bicycle. Her father at once fixed his attention on her: he had done so since her birth, as if he could not keep believing in her existence without frequent verification. Yet he knew nothing about her goings on. Edward called out to Eileen that he had thought she might like to come to the dance in the car with him.

* * *

It was only eleven o'clock when Eileen and Edward came out of the rather wretched Toc-H hut where the Cottesden dances were held. He had danced all but one dance with her; that she had given to Jerry Tuff who 'looked in' for long enough to enable both of them to wonder what on earth they had once had in common. Edward said, 'What do you want to do now?'

'Go home.'

'It's a fine night. What about a drive?'

'Not tonight, Ted. I don't feel quite meself.'

'All right.'

He drove slowly to her cottage. There was a nearly full moon and he could see the primroses like new shillings charitably scattered along the banks under the hedges, and the ghostly white of wild cherry-blossom held high above the still leafless coppices. As they came in sight of Figgis's cottage they saw that a window still showed lights—the raw, pale yellow of a paraffin pressure lamp. Eileen said, 'E's still up. Don't you start nothing with him still about.' 'All right, all right,' Edward said, sulkily.

'Not like him to sit up,' she added, and, after a silence, 'It's the car.'

'The car?'

'Sright,' she said, without further explanation, leaving Edward to solve the riddle. They had hardly stopped when the door of the cottage opened and Figgis appeared, holding up a lamp. He did not come out. Eileen, getting out of the car, said, 'Come in tomorrow. G'night.'

'I'm going to Maidstone in the morning. Want to come?'

'Can't. Come in on y'way back.'

Edward had decided to go as far as Maidstone to be sure of getting the radio components he needed for his experiment on his uncle's wireless set. He did not set off early but waited until his aunt was well into her work; otherwise she would have reorganized her day and gone with him. He was willing to take her any other day, but he wanted to keep his appointment with Eileen. Wounded and angered by Doris's failure to be in fact what she was in his private fiction, he wanted to be revenged on her. Starved of her, he was physically uneasy and after several hours of dancing with Eileen it was easier than ever to make the substitution.

Driving back from Maidstone towards Eileen's Edward suddenly remembered that it was Saturday, and moreover Easter Saturday. Figgis would not be out at work. He felt resentful and had an impulse to drive straight back to his uncle's. But then he thought that Eileen might come out with him: they could go to the beechwoods behind Figgis's Hill, on the Stouridge Back.

Curious to see what the new owner had done with the old house called Mulberry Trees, he made a detour. He saw McFadden as he drove slowly past, a tall, very dark man with a cadaverous face, who stopped walking behind his motor-mower to return Edward's stare. But as he came level with the second ancient mulberry-tree, propped up by iron posts, he caught a glimpse of Figgis drawing out a seed-drill in the kitchen garden. Then the high brick wall hid him. But he was there, he was not at his own house. Edward began to drive fast.

* * *

Eileen was making a cake when he walked in through the open door. Crowded into the hundred square feet of the room which served her and her father as kitchen and sitting-room, drawing-room, dining-room, study and office and pantry, were an old cooking range, a deal table, two battered upholstered arm-chairs, two cupboards, a sink with a spout and pump-handle over it. The water came from a deep well in the yard where Figgis's lean hens moulted on cinders decorated with cabbage stalks. The range had been stoked to heat the

oven and the room was insufferably hot. When Edward complained Eileen said, 'Take your coat off, then.' He did so, and caught hold of her as she came round the table and she shook him off and said, 'Don't muck me about. I got this cake to get in the oven.'

He sat down and watched her. This domesticity was new to him, and offensive; it denied what Eileen was supposed to be. There is a complacent respectability about any woman at work with a needle or kitchen-gear which is hostile to our hopes of her as unvirtuous. He took off his coat and tie and unbuttoned his collar and sat there in Figgis's broken arm-chair and watched her, exasperated, until she put the cake in the oven and dusted off her hands, glancing at the old alarm-clock which ticked noisily on one corner of the table. Smugly, she said, 'You s'll have a taste in an hour,' and began fumbling with the strings of her old, torn apron. Symbol of housewifely chastity, Edward was glad to see it coming off, and when she had trouble with the knot said, 'Let me.' With an air of provocative obedience she came and stood with her back to him. He untied the apron and threw it on to the table and clapping his hands in front of her waist, pulled her down on to his knees.

They sat clasped mouth to mouth and Edward was beginning to be very excited when there was a heavy crunching of the cinders which formed the path to the door and a ruling-class voice, female, said, 'Is anyone at home?' Eileen jumped up and went towards the unlatched door which Edward had pulled to when he came in. Edward stood up and crossed to the window, where he would be out of sight, and looked out at the hens stupidly scratching at the cinders long scratched barren of anything edible. From time to time one of them would stop scratching and apply an eye to the close examination of the spoil with that squinting, sharply legal air of their kind. Raised above them by a plank on two oil-drums was a long hutch roughly made of orange-boxes in which Figgis kept his ferrets. Behind him Edward heard the cultured stridency of the voice which had interrupted them, saying something about Figgis using his vote on Monday. Eileen kept saying, 'Well, I don't know I'm sure.' 'Tett is the name to vote for,' the voice insisted, 'Tett. Will you remind your father?'

'Well, I don't know I'm sure.'

'I'll leave this leaflet. You can read it to your father. I'm sure he'll be most interested. Good afternoon.'

They observed a prudent silence of one minute and then Edward said, 'Who was it?'

'The old cow from up at Roon Manor. Ma Trouncer.'

'Oh, her. Funny we never heard the car.'

'She gets round on 'er bicycle.'

Edward glanced at the leaflet Eileen had put down on the table. It said, Isaac Tett—YOUR Man on the COUNCIL. Eileen said, 'Them Trouncers do a lot of politics as they call it. Can't see that they get anything out of it, meself. The colonel's all right but I can't do with 'er.'

Edward gave Eileen a cigarette and took one himself and rolled the leaflet into a spill to light them from the fire. 'Well, damn her soul for busting in,' he said. 'You tell your father to vote for the other chap, whoever he is.'

'Vote? Him? Don' be so soft!'

It was true that Figgis would never vote. He had an idea that to do so was to make some dangerous concession to *them*, to yield himself up to *them*. This was the same suspicion as inspired his attitude to 'the stamp'. The stamp was National Insurance. If, wild improbability, he had ever had a political policy it would have been that nobody ought to have to have National Insurance. He did not know what it was: it was just 'the stamp', to pay for which some of his money was taken away. It was some kind of oppression. Like the vote. If, near election times, someone who had forgotten his views asked him how he was going to vote, he would grin and shake his head and say, 'You won't catch *me* in there,' meaning the polling booth which, sinister fact, was watched over by the police.

Ardour cooled, Edward said, 'I'd better go home.'

'Come in t'night.'

'Won't he be here?'

'Sat'd'y night's his pub night, you know that.'

Once a week her father sat from seven to ten in the bar of the Plough, paid his twopence towards 'the club' and drank two half-pints of bitter. 'Half past seven, then,' Edward said.

Back at his uncle's he had the place to himself. Uncle Walter, working again, was in the greenhouses. Edward found him and for a few minutes helped him pick side-shoots off tomato plants, and then slipped away and went into the house and took the radio chassis out of its box. He set about fixing the new components in place and soldering the connections. It did not take him long, but for half an hour he fiddled with a trimming condenser, trying to find the best value. His aunt, who had cycled to Goudhurst, came in with her shopping basket just as he was resoldering a bad joint and wanted

to know what he was doing. 'Wait and hear,' he said. She brought him a cup of tea as he was switching on the set for testing. Tone and volume were both sharply improved. Once again he had been extraordinarily lucky: calculation in such cases is apt to be imperfect and the final result achieved by trial and error. He had achieved a very nearly optimum result at the first attempt. In all the years of electronics which followed, that only happened once again. His aunt said, 'Why, whatever've you done to it? It's not the same machine at all! Real twopence coloured! I'll fetch your uncle.'

She had a large hand-bell for calling her husband and she went out on to the doorstep and clanged it noisily. Presently Walter Tillotson came stumping across the yard and Aunt Sarah said, 'Listen to what Teddy's done to your old wireless.'

A pianist was playing Chopin studies and they listened; the way Edward's aunt looked at him, you'd have thought he was playing them himself. Uncle Walter said, rather suspiciously, 'What did you do to it?' Edward tried to explain, but he did not understand, only listened patiently and said at last, 'Isn't there money in it?' Edward said he did not know but he shouldn't think so. It did not, in fact, occur to him that what he had done had not been done before, so that what saved his small triumph from being short-lived was his aunt's old habit of writing a letter to his father whenever Edward was staying with her. She had done so when Edward was a child because she thought that his father, deprived of him, would be worrying; she judged other people by herself. She still continued to write the letter because it had become established custom. It was her rule to fill two sheets of the flimsy, lined paper which she used. She wrote this ritual letter on the Saturday night—Edward's uncle did not approve of letter writing on Sundays—and, as Edward discovered later, she told his father how clever he had been with the wireless set. If the Tillotson feed-back was useful to our war effort during the years which followed, the nation owes its gratitude to Edward's Aunt Sarah.

After tea Edward said he was going for a nice long walk, and he reached Figgis's cottage by half past seven. Neither Eileen nor he had any doubt about what he had come for. But they did not go straight to her room. She had the cake, already cut for her father's tea, on the table, and she cut him a slice. It was a mild evening, the doors and windows were shut, the range was still hot, and as the room was always dark at evening, Eileen had lit the pressure lamp. It was even hotter in there than it had been in the afternoon. Outside,

two blackbirds whistled sweetly back and forth across the golden glow of the evening garden. Edward ate his cake and pulled Eileen down into the chair with him. She put her tongue into his mouth. He discovered that she had nothing on under her blouse and started to unbutton it. They both sweated. She undid his shirt and began to stroke his chest. Frantic to be touching every point of her body with every point of his, he pulled the blouse off and threw it on the floor and started kissing her breasts. She shut her eyes and her breath, fast and shallow, blew tiny bubbles at the corner of her lips. Neither of them heard the sound of her father's approach. One moment they were alone, not simply alone with each other, but each in the selfish isolation of intensely pleasurable sensation. The next, Figgis was in the doorway, enormous, looming, stooping a little forward with his great bony hands hanging idly in front of him, and the harsh light of the lamp making his face a composition of dark-edged blocks of light and shadow, an impressionist daub. Eileen got to her feet, staggered, covered herself by crossing her arms over her breasts, and backed away towards the window. There was nothing reassuring in Figgis's silent immobility, and she began to whimper. Edward stood up, buttoning his shirt with shaking hands and, idiotically, said, 'It's time I was pushing off.' That seemed to release Figgis, he made a sudden movement, a lurching rush, with his mouth open but uttering no sound, no reproaches, no abuse, only breathing so loud that he seemed to be snoring.

The only time Edward had ever been frightened by a dog was by one which didn't bark, but simply ran straight at him with an extraordinary air of hostile purpose, its mouth open and its lips curled back from its teeth, drooling. It was like that with Figgis, but terrible; ridiculous, too, with Edward dodging round the table trying to draw Figgis into the room and get himself out of it, but for Figgis's silence and the bestial set of his white face. In the intensity of his concentration on Edward he was some time realizing what obstacle it was which stood between him and the consummation of his passion of hate; but when he did he caught hold of the table and sent it crashing into the wall. The cake fell off on to the floor between them. Figgis had Edward now with his back to the hot range: he could feel its heat. He had a brief vision of his Uncle Walter's hand in the fire. Not to attack Figgis, but to save himself from the fire, he lunged forward, put his foot into the cake, and slipped as Figgis charged at him with reaching hands. Edward sprawled far under them, his own hands out to save himself, and his shoulder striking Figgis's leg a

violent blow just below the knee as he fell. That checked Figgis's impetus well below his centre of balance and he went over. Edward heard the dead, flat sound—*chunk*—of the man's head against the iron of the range and he heard Eileen scream as he scrambled himself upright. He experienced a passionate wish that she would be silent, not draw attention to this indecency. He had one idea, to get out, and was making for the door, then saw Figgis out of the side of his eye, still a sprawled heap.

Edward stopped and turned and saw Eileen with one hand over her mouth and her eyes very wide, staring, looking at her father on the floor. He said, 'For Christ's sake put something on.' He looked round for her blouse, picked it up off the floor beside the chair and tossed it to her. She started to cry as she put it on and he went down on his knees beside Figgis. He had no idea what to do, he was helpless, to him Figgis seemed as massively immovable as a mountain. The burnt cut on his forehead extended from temple to temple. With no conviction Edward said, 'Water; he's unconscious.' 'Get out,' Eileen said, hiccuped and repeated, 'Get out. He'll kill you.'

Edward was rising to pump some water himself when Eileen screamed again and he turned on her sharply to silence her and saw a man standing in the doorway: the new man at Mulberry Trees, Mr. McFadden. He said, 'Good God, what's happened?' and advanced into the room, looking at Eileen and saying, 'You'll be Miss Figgis. I was to fetch your father and his ferrets, we were to work the old warren by moonlight.' Before he had finished this explanation he was kneeling beside Figgis, opening one eye, touching the unbleeding cut, then putting a hand inside his jacket. 'He had a fall,' Edward said. 'He's unconscious.'

Mr. McFadden looked briefly and without indulgence into Edward's face. 'The man's dead,' he said.

6

EDWARD'S McFadden week, as he called it, began with Eileen's weeping suddenly becoming noisy, a childish howling and sobbing interrupted by one hysterical cry of 'You done it, you!' which directed McFadden's eyes to him as he rose from his kneeling position beside the body, and which raised the intensity of Edward's

fear to the point at which he felt it as physical sickness. His hands became very cold. McFadden looked at him neutrally but with attention. He was a sallow man with matt black hair and blue eyes. There was comfort in the absence of excitement from his face.

Edward had not known McFadden; then for one week he knew him with an intimacy which originated in the violence with which their acquaintance began; then, excepting in his writings—he was important enough always to be given a by-line in his paper—Edward ceased to know him. He set the tone at once when Edward said dully that they had better get a doctor and the police, by saying, 'Never be in a hurry to call either, man.' Half his remarks ended with the word *man*, but not as some Welshmen's do, or some Anglo-Indians'. His *man* was not emphatic or ejaculatory; it was a word of address, a vocative shifted to the end of the sentence. For his speech, in the soft and pretty accent of Edinburgh, was nearly always didactic: he was a man called upon by other people's fecklessness to give instructions.

From Edward's green face he looked away and slowly round the room. Fixing his eyes on Eileen, who had stopped crying, he said, 'First we might tidy up a bit,' and as if he had reproached her with the state of the room she did actually make a move to lay hold of the table and then, seeing her father's body, started to cry again, but quietly this time. It was McFadden who pulled the table back into the middle of the room. Later, it must have been the next day or the day after, when Edward asked him, 'How did you know you oughtn't to have left things as they were for the police to see and draw conclusions?' McFadden understood him, understood that he was asking how he knew that Edward had not really, despite Eileen's cry, 'done it'. His answer was, 'How do we ever know anything important? Not by thinking it out. We know, and half our troubles come from pretending we don't. And in any case I wouldn't've rushed things, man.'

'What do you mean?'

'Only that the living are always more worth thinking about than the dead. You cannot help the dead, man.'

That was an assurance which was only too welcome at the time.

It was McFadden who found the right story for the police, the story almost true, only leaving out the essential—the violent outrage of Figgis's obscure and powerful feelings—which was repeated at the inquest. Edward Tillotson had called to see Eileen Figgis; as he

was leaving Tillotson had kissed her. At that moment the deceased had come in and incomprehensibly (implication that a psychopathologist would have comprehended it only too horribly), made a violent rush at Tillotson, caught his foot in the table leg, and fallen. Edward saw the truth, tragic when it included the white rage of Figgis's outraged modesty and paternity, turned into a kind of farce when it was left out: picturing Figgis, the tall, ungainly, angry man in that knock-about accident, it was difficult not to laugh, although it had killed him. He was made ridiculous. Eileen's evidence was given sullenly, reluctantly: the bitter hostility she had fixed on Edward was in conflict with, was finally overcome by, her gipsy mother's training to lie to the men in authority; whatever was uncertain, it was sure that they were the enemy and you told them the truth at your peril. They were helped by Ernest Figgis: 'Was it true that his brother had sometimes been suddenly and unreasonably violent?' 'It certainly was.' Only Walter Tillotson, that night at tea, disagreed with the verdict of death by misadventure. There was, he said, no such thing: sudden death was always a judgement. But wasn't judgement always postponed until the hereafter though implied in advance by 'justification' of the elect? Edward asked that question to keep his mind off his own part in the business, succeeding in his uncle's case, but not in his aunt's, of course. She was offended with him and showed it. 'Kissing that slut! She's been handled by every lout in the parish. I thought better of you, really I did.'

It was Aunt Sarah's grief as well as his need to lean on someone since her support had been withdrawn which drew Edward to Mulberry Trees every day until the formalities were over and he could return to London. He needed someone to whom he could keep saying, 'I wish there was something I could do.' 'Aye,' McFadden said, on the sixth or seventh repetition of this plaint, 'you'll be too young to accept that some things can't be mended.' The permanence of Figgis's death was, indeed, an atrocious novelty. Above all Edward wanted to exorcize the spell Eileen had put on him as McFadden and he were leaving the inquest and Edward went up to her as she came out, not exactly alone but trailing well behind her sour-faced uncle, and began to mutter something about how sorry he was; she looked at him, frozen-faced, and said, 'You done it.' And to McFadden Edward repeated, 'Because, you know, I did. I did do it.'

'Don't be so daft, man.'

'In a way, I did.'

'Oh, in a way I'm responsible for the murder of Spain and Czechoslovakia. You need to cultivate a sense of proportion.'

'I don't know how I'll live with myself!' Edward exaggerated wildly. McFadden looked at him out of his dark, unsmiling face, and said, 'You'll not know French, I doubt?'

'As a matter of fact, yes. Why?'

'A very clever Frenchman who had a lot to put up with, the painter Toulouse-Lautrec, had a good saying: *Il faut savoir se supporter soi-même*. You'll learn, man. I'm not denying that you've given yourself a weight to carry, but it's not by self-condemnation that most of us err.'

* * *

McFadden was right, of course: it did not take Edward a week to 'learn to bear himself'. He was all right; it was Figgis who had been a kind of lunatic and as for Eileen, everyone knew what she was. All the same, the accident and its consequences loomed so enormous that when he returned to work at the beginning of the following week and Mr. Pardoner handed him an envelope containing his dismissal, Edward would have attributed it to the disgrace of being nationally known to have kissed Eileen Figgis and killed her father by it, but for the fact that the envelope contained not a week's money but three months'. That made him ask, 'What's the reason for this, do you know?'

'Economy in the department is what I was told.'

'Queer economy,' Edward said, showing him six five-pound notes, two one-pound notes, and some silver. Mr. Pardoner shrugged and, as he had done once before, said, 'If you don't know, Tillotson, I'm sure I don't! I shall be sorry to lose you,' he added, 'but I shall not pretend that this is a bad thing for you. You're doing no good, here.'

Edward went out to his own desk and called David on the house phone and said, 'I've been sacked. Did you know?'

'Sacked? Come up here at once, Edward, at once. Of course I didn't know.'

He was dictating to his secretary when Edward reached his room, but he dismissed her. He was very white and the small muscles of his jaw were contracting and relaxing rhythmically as he clenched and unclenched his teeth. Edward showed him the note of dismissal and asked whether three months' pay was usual on such occasions.

'No, of course it's not,' David said, impatiently. Edward watched him without indulgence: the light he saw him by was much less

bright since Mr. Tillotson's outburst; not humbly and hopefully did Edward wait for David to come to his defence, but righteously and resentfully. Without looking up, David said, 'I suppose you realize whose fault this is?'

'No, but I don't believe it's mine,' Edward said, violently, repudiating the suggestion of his own conscience that you couldn't be the death of a man and get away with it unscathed.

'No, it isn't yours. Excepting that you should choose your friends more carefully.'

Edward saw that David meant himself and some of the wind went out of his sails. David got to his feet and said, 'I'll go and see my father.'

'Your father?'

It was a question but really Edward knew what he meant. He remembered the old man with his white hair and his noble bearing, and his crooked nose like a derisive comment on the rest of him, asking him, with that intense seriousness, whether he had known his son long. But David's move towards the door of his room was halting and at the door he turned and said, dully, 'I suppose you do want to stay here?'

'It's a job. What else can I do?'

He did not really feel like that: it was an answer much too old for his age. But he was angrily intent on making someone feel that he had been wronged. David said, 'Something better, I should have thought. I'm sure I could find you something in your own line.'

'In short, you want me out of here, too?'

'Yes. That doesn't mean what you're pretending to think it means, Edward. Don't judge while you're angry.'

'I'm not sure I like your kind of help,' Edward said.

'What do you mean by that?'

He meant Custer-Dwyer and Doris, of course; he wanted someone to blame for his loss of her, which had resulted in the death of Figgis; he wanted David to take the blame for Figgis's broken neck which was what he actually died of, the violence with which his neck was forced back as his head struck the iron of the range. But whatever Edward was feeling he could not complain in so many words that Custer-Dwyer had given Doris a very good job and sent her to Paris: his I could; but he could not.

'In the first place,' David said, 'it was hardly my fault that Custer-Dwyer gave Doris a job . . .'

'I'm not complaining of that, of course.'

'Then of what, Edward? Do be reasonable.'

'I suppose you know what sort of woman that Mme Tisserant is?'

'I warned you against Custer-Dwyer. And anyway, Doris can look after herself I imagine.'

'You know nothing about Doris. But anyway, if all your friends are like that I don't particularly want a job with any of them.'

David returned to his desk and sat down again, his jaw muscles working harder than ever. He picked up a pencil and began to draw a geometrical doodle on a letter. There was a long silence and then he said, 'That man at your party, Reuben Lipschitz—I know his chief sound engineer, a man named James Connor.' David looked up at Edward and went on, 'His tastes are reassuringly—orthodox. He employs a staff of electricians. You would presumably have to join a trade union, but I suppose you would not object to that. I will see him tonight and . . . Get out, now, will you, Edward? Get out. I'll call you tomorrow. You won't be leaving till Friday.'

His gentle but repeated 'Get out' was like a blow in the face. Edward showed what he felt but David said no more, he made no move, and Edward had to leave him like that, sitting there mournfully, shading alternate squares of his doodle.

* * *

It was raining hard when Edward came out of the factory and he put the hood of the car up. The rush-hour traffic was heavy. At the division of northern roads in Camden Town there was a huge, crawling, reeking agglomeration of buses and trams, lorries, vans, taxis and private motor-cars, moving a few yards or stationary, without regard to the changing colours of the traffic lights. Two policemen, their rain-capes streaming, were going through the dance-like motions of traffic control, as if there were merit in empty ritual. Edward was in the near-side traffic lane. His car had no sidescreens, but the rain was vertical and not much was coming into the car. He stared idly at the people huddled round a bus-stop standard marked 74B: they were waiting for the next Overbury Park bus. He suddenly realized that the face he was looking at was familiar, the face of a tall girl holding an umbrella over a small, neat woman. Glancing forward he saw that there was no danger of the traffic moving for some minutes, and getting out of the car he crossed to the bus stop and said, 'Miss Woodreeve, I have the car over there. I'm going your way. Let me take you and your mother home.'

She did not hesitate: all she said was, 'Thanks, kind of you.' It was Mrs. Woodreeve who became nervously voluble in her thanks.

Almost as soon as Edward had them in the car, the traffic-block broke up and they all swept forward. In the bustle of getting them into the car, out of the downpour, he had put them both into the back seat. It was a mistake: Mrs. Woodreeve felt obliged to talk, to break at intervals into staccato bursts of civility. In an effort to overcome the rudeness of having his back to her, Edward kept leaning back towards her and half turning his head to answer, until at last Miss Woodreeve said, 'Mummy, don't talk to the driver! Either he'll put his neck out of joint or drive us all into a shop-front!'

Edward laughed, and for the rest of the way they drove in silence excepting when Mrs. Woodreeve said, 'Are you quite sure it's not out of your way Mr. . . . er . . . ?'

'Tillotson, Mummy,' Miss Woodreeve said, and, 'You're quite wet enough already. It isn't out of his way, is it, Mr. Tillotson?'

'No,' Edward said. 'Fourteen Overbury Park Road, if I remember rightly.'

He pulled up at their house and jumped out of the car to open the door for them, so pleased with his own kindness and courtesy that he was intent on doing the thing really well. But he was not quick enough for Miss Woodreeve, who was already on the pavement and turning to help her mother, who at once began talking again, saying how kind he had been and looking at him with a slight, diffident smile on her small, wrinkled face. 'It's not often nowadays that people are so . . .' She hesitated for a word and concluded, 'considerate'. Frowning a little as she did so and, to express the imperfection of the word, she moved her half-clenched hand in a swift gesture two or three times back and forth at the level of her mouth.

What happened then was remarkable: Edward saw Miss Woodreeve's face not as one he had seen just once before, but as one he had formerly known well. For a moment he was three feet tall and standing clasping the high railings of an enclosure in Overbury Park. The kangaroo was there, and the emu. Looking at Miss Woodreeve—they were of a height and their eyes on the same level—he said, or rather exclaimed, 'Celia!' and then put his hand to his mouth in embarrassment. Surprised, amused, she said, 'That's my name. I didn't . . .' but, in haste to explain himself, Edward interrupted her, 'Why was there a kangaroo in Overbury Park? I mean, why a kangaroo? Did you ever wonder?'

They stared at each other in silence under the rain. From the door of her house at the top of the steps Mrs. Woodreeve said, 'Do come in. You're getting so wet.'

'The French lady,' Celia said.

'My mother,' Edward explained.

He followed her up the steps and into the house, and while they were taking their coats off Celia was saying, 'Mummy, Mr. Tillotson is the little boy in the park, with the French mother. *You* remember.'

'I was always so sorry for that great bird,' Mrs. Woodreeve said, vaguely.

'What bird, Mummy? Oh, the emu!'

'So clumsy, and not being able to fly . . .' And then, in delayed surprise, 'God bless my soul, what a coincidence! I hope your mother is well? Such a cheerful young woman, I remember.'

'She's in France,' Edward said: he had developed a tone for saying that which put an end to questions. Both women looked at him and away. They went into the front room and Mrs. Woodreeve left them to make tea. Celia said, 'What do you do now?'

'I was working for Mendoza's, the cigarette people. I got the sack today.'

'Bad luck. What will you do now?'

'I don't know. What do you do?'

'Work, you mean? I'm on the women's page of the *Messenger*.'

'Then I know a colleague of yours, Angus McFadden.'

'Oh, he's a great man. I don't know him except to stand aside for when he walks down a corridor.'

Edward didn't believe it: he didn't believe this girl ever stood aside for anyone. He said, 'Do you like it?'

'It's a living. What made you suddenly remember me?'

At the time Edward did not know the answer: it was only later, dwelling on the scene, that he realized it had been that curious gesture of her mother's. So he said, 'I recognized you.'

'But you can't have!' she laughed, 'we were only about eight—or I was. I think you were six.'

It gave him an excuse to stare at her face: there was a golden glow not only to her hair but to her skin, an elegance in the poise of her head, the slenderness of her neck which, certainly, can hardly have been apparent in a child of eight. There was that in Edward's stare which made her flush, which made him flush. He said, 'Well, there it is. I hope your father is better?'

'Sometimes. He has bad days. More of them lately. As usual, the doctors don't know what's the matter with him.'

Mrs. Woodreeve came in with the tea, then. Edward did not know

what they talked about. Presently he said he must go and, at the door, Celia, hesitating for a moment, said, 'If you find out why there was a kangaroo, do let me know.'

'I will. Are you on the phone here?'

'I don't live here. My digs are on the phone.'

'Then may I have the number, please?'

She gave it to him and he wrote it down.

'But I'm here week-ends,' she said.

* * *

He had little time for investigating the provenance of the Overbury Park kangaroo in the next few days. He had not seen his father when he got home the night before, but Mr. Tillotson was waiting for him this time, coming out into the hall as soon as he heard Edward's key in the door and greeting him with, 'Well, I hope you're satisfied. A pretty mess you've made.'

For that evening only Edward was bitter against his aunt for betraying him. If she had not written him a second letter his father would probably never have heard about the accident. Only one national newspaper reported it and it was not the one he read. Afterwards he realized that by her own lights Aunt Sarah had no alternative. As to his father's greeting that evening, Edward precipitated the row which followed by saying angrily, 'Oh, you don't know the half of it. I've got the sack, too.' And when Mr. Tillotson seized on that to make it another clause in the indictment, Edward infuriated him by saying that he was being inconsistent: had he not wanted him out of David Mendoza's influence? As it was, David, he said, was getting him another job.

'What job?'

'With a firm owned by your friend Lipschitz.'

'Doing what?'

'Sound engineer. I'm to see a man called James Connor.'

'Rubbish! Mendoza's just fobbing you off. What do you know about sound engineering?'

It was Maud Olantigh, trying to restore the peace, who gave Edward an answer not only to his father but, in the event, to Connor when the sound engineer said, 'What do you think you can do for us, Mr. Tillotson? We don't carry passengers in this outfit.' That was a couple of days later. All Maud did was to take Aunt Sarah's first letter out of her bag and say, 'There's this, dear. We must be fair to Edward. Your sister-in-law says their wireless isn't the same set.' On the face of it, a ridiculously feeble argument, as Mr. Tillotson at

once pointed out. 'Don't talk like a fool, Maud. Do you imagine amateur pottering with a wireless set fits a man to work for Lipschitz? You don't know what you're talking about.'

That was an argument powerful enough to silence her at once: there was a convention that Maud did not understand about practical things, business things; she was the artistic one, it was Mr. Tillotson who was the practical man.

Edward had been made bitterly angry during the row not by what his father said, but by the circumstance that he could see both his father's face and his own, side by side, in the looking-glass over the hearth. He kept catching glimpses of their two faces and he saw that he was very like his father, and it made him feel first ridiculous, disarmed, rather as if he were trying to argue while tied in an undignified posture; and then furiously angry. It was not only that he saw that he resembled his father, and that in his opinion Mr. Tillotson's face was a woundingly coarse caricature of his own; Edward began to feel areas of his face falling into positions and making expressions which felt what his father's looked like. It was almost as if he, darling, smooth, young Edward, were being forced into Mr. Tillotson's corrupt old carcass with its rotten teeth and wrinkles. And the idea that as he aged he would, in very fact, grow more and more like his father, was inexpressibly disgusting to Edward, so that for some hours he hated him intensely. Mr. Tillotson could not understand the consequent bitter violence of some of the things his son said, but he sensed, with real grief, that there was much worse trouble between them than a disagreement over Edward's morals and conduct. At last he rose and said quietly, 'I can't go on with this. I've done my best for you. You're on your own now. Good night.' He went out of the room leaving Edward with Maud, who was in tears. She said, 'He doesn't mean it, Edward.'

'As if I cared! As soon as I get a new job I'm getting out of here.'

'You'll think better of it, dear.'

Edward did not think better of it. He would not have done so even had he known that the next day his father telephoned Reuben Lipschitz, so that though Edward owed the promptness with which Connor offered him a job to his own explanation of what he had done to his Uncle Walter's wireless raised to a much higher power of prestige by language as technical as he could muster, and diagrams with calculations as slick as he could make them, he probably owed his reception, after that initially brisk question which was put for form's sake, and the goodwill with which Connor listened

to him, as much to his father's interference as to David's introduction. But Edward did not know that; it would have made no difference if he had known it. Because of his father he had seen an image of himself which was not of his own making. He had to get away from that.

PART TWO

I

Two weeks after being started in the research department of the Kinesound Corporation where, under Connor, he was put to the devising of pulse-shaping circuits and saw a cathode ray oscilloscope for the first time in his life, Edward moved into lodgings within walking distance of his work. He had no idea what this work was for. Connor had told him not to talk about it: it involved, he said, an industrial secret. 'And remember, you're on probation; on the face of it, a chap who's acquired his knowledge as casually as you have is not likely to be much use to us. But Mr. Lipschitz says he'd rather have a man with flair, whatever that may be, than a trained scientist. It's up to you, Tillotson.'

Doris did not return from Paris, nor did he hear from her. And when he wrote, she did not answer his letters. For a few weeks he lived a curiously lonely life. His landlady, Mrs. Campion, was a lean, brisk, foul-mouthed and very good-natured woman with a cigarette permanently sticking out of her face. She read science-fiction and popular psychology and was a member of the Communist Party. She said, 'Bring your friends in, all sexes and ages, and make as much f——g noise as you like, see? We don't mind.' But Edward had no friends. David had telephoned and taken him out to dinner; Edward had talked about Doris until David, white and pinched, said, 'For God's sake give that slut a rest, there's a good chap,' and Edward, unable to hit him in *Flaubert's*, had remained sullenly silent for the rest of the meal and, outside in the street later, turned his back on his friend and walked away, and thereafter would neither speak to him on the telephone nor answer his letters.

Edward was no longer really suffering because he had lost Doris. He had great difficulty in summoning up an image of her, he seemed to have forgotten what she looked like. But he had been thwarted of her by other people, by Custer-Dwyer and that damned Lesbian partner of his, and when he thought of this he was morosely angry and discovered that he was capable of hatred. And apart from his work there was nothing to take him out of himself. He had breakfast in his lodgings, and lunch in the factory canteen, where the only

man who showed friendliness was a colleague in the research department named Adam Olby, who tried to persuade Edward to come with him to meetings of the Labour Party; and of the trade union, which Edward had been obliged to join. But Edward was not capable of taking any interest in the generalities which politicians deal in: political talk seemed to him perfectly meaningless and often ridiculous. He did take Adam Olby home to his lodgings one evening. Adam was on the extreme left of his Party, and got on very well with Mrs. Campion, and Edward was obliged to listen to them for several hours prophesying an immediate future of great unpleasantness and a remote future of improbable comfort.

He ate his evening meal at a restaurant called the Fortified Flour Company, almost opposite his lodgings. It remained open late to receive the custom of railway workers from the neighbouring locomotive maintenance depot. He liked it because it had waitresses: not that they were pretty; all three were old, with pendant, yellow faces, and the tired, timid kindness and heavy, plodding gait of defeated women. But at least you sat at a table and they brought you your food: it was not a cafeteria, not like the canteen; it was shabby, and even rather dirty, but unlike the new, clean Kinesound canteen, it was not squalid.

Edward went to the Fortified Flour restaurant for lunch one Saturday. Nobody but the waitress ever talked to him there. The only other customers that day were two old railwaymen who sat in a corner and played dominoes with their caps on. When the waitress brought him his poached egg on welsh and milky coffee she saw him staring at them and said, 'You mustn't mind about them not taking their hats off. There was a lady come in here, very superior class of lady, and when I bring 'er her cuppa tea she says why don't those men take their hats off indoors, Miss? You could see it wasn't what she'd been used to but as I told her, I says, being uniform it's not the same.'

Edward knew what the superior class of lady had been feeling: undistinguished. She had needed some tribute to her worth to set her up. So did he. He finished his meal and walked to the cul-de-sac where he kept the Sunbeam, and drove to Overbury Park to pay his weekly duty call. His father was out. Maud asked him to go for a walk in the park with her, and Edward agreed. The crocuses were fading and wilting, and under the cedar tree some daffodils were in flower. The sunlight hardened the wind-rippled surface of the pond. A blue and green drake stood at the water's edge, prodding under

his wing with his long, flat bill. When Edward and Maud were passing the enclosure where the kangaroo had lived, Edward saw that it had been dug into raw-looking deep trenches and earthworks which Maud said were air-raid shelters. Some dejected-looking men were doing something to these ominous diggings with ordinary gardening spades. A park-keeper, who had a white moustache, overheard Maud's explanation and said, 'All them acres of good turf. It's a shame.' Edward suddenly remembered the question he had put to Celia Woodreeve, whom he had not seen again since he had rescued her and Mrs. Woodreeve from the rain. He said to the keeper, 'You remember there used to be a kangaroo and an emu, here.'

'That's right, they died,' the old man said, like his colleague when Edward had walked in this same place after learning that Doris had gone to Paris. Edward said, 'Why?'

'Course of nature, sir.'

'No. I mean how did you come to have two such unusual animals in the first place?'

The park-keeper told him and Edward suddenly had a new purpose. He took Maud home and drove to Overbury Park Road, through the tunnel. When he stood waiting for the door to the Woodreeves' house to be opened his heart began to beat heavily, although there was no ostensible reason to be excited. Mrs. Woodreeve came to the door and said at once, 'Why, Mr. Tillotson, isn't it? You'll have come to see Celia, but I'm alone in the house. She will be disappointed.'

She asked him in and he stayed listening to her nervous talk for a few minutes. He realized that the curvature of the little finger on the hand with which she made the characteristic gesture which had taken his mind back to his sixth year, was not natural. The hand was deformed by arthritis. He asked for a piece of paper and wrote a note for Celia saying that he had solved the kangaroo mystery and leaving her his telephone number.

Just before lunch-time on the following Monday Connor sent for him and said, 'You're to take these blue-prints and go to the Dorchester at once. Ask for Mr. Orage, they'll send you up. Reuben Lipschitz is with this man Orage—Bayard Orage. They've got to a point where Reuben's out of his depth—technicalities. You'll do the explaining.'

Edward glanced at the blue-prints and saw that he would be able to explain them; they were partly his own work, they incorporated a

refinement of his device—now known as the TFB—into a video-circuit, for the first time. He said, 'Who's Bayard Orage?'

'North American Electronics.' It was a great name and Edward, quoting from one of Wallace Smith's novels which Maud had lent him, said, 'We're getting up in the bucks.' Connor laughed, and told him something about Orage's career and Edward was impressed.

Edward took the blue-prints and set off for the Dorchester. Just before he reached it he had occasion to go down to the underground public lavatory at the corner of Beacon Passage. There were two other men down there, a big, round-faced man in a bowler hat and—Edward flushed—Major Custer-Dwyer. As soon as the major saw Edward, he was all over him. He offered his hand which Edward found he could not refuse. He said that Doris had been 'asking after' him, and that she was doing wonders in Paris, and that they were going to bring her home soon as the major was sure that war would be declared any day now, 'not but what the girl will be quite as safe over there, as over here, if the Boche starts anything he'll never get past the Maginot Line.' And, 'How about coming round to my flat for a drink?' Custer-Dwyer added.

He was still being his breezy, not his soldierly, self, when, suddenly, surprisingly, and confusingly, there was this other man, the bowler-hatted man, pushing in, tipping his hat to Edward and saying, 'Is this man importuning you, sir?'

Edward looked at him and if he had kept on looking at him he might have said, 'No, certainly not.' But, in astonishment, he turned to Custer-Dwyer and the major's face had become old, and his mouth was shaking: he was grey, flabby, and repulsive; and far from rousing pity in Edward's heart, this made him resentful, and seeking to sustain his anger and make it seem 'reasonable', he remembered that Custer-Dwyer and his associate had robbed him of Doris, the Doris who was certainly his own, since he had made her. The bowler-hatted man, who was, of course, a police-officer—the place was under observation as a notorious beat for male prostitutes—was still talking, explaining that Edward's proper course was to complain that 'this man' had been soliciting. 'We've been keeping our eye on him, sir. But what can you do if the public won't co-operate?'

Edward had a Kinesound card in his pocket. He took it out, with a feeling of violence, an almost malevolent satisfaction, as if it had been a dagger instead of a bit of cardboard, and turning his face away from Custer-Dwyer, he gave it to the policeman and said, 'You can get me at this address. But I won't charge him.'

'We'll do that, sir. It's your evidence we want.'

Edward nodded and hurried up the stairs, conscious of Custer-Dwyer's eyes full of horror, of that almost vulgarly 'distinguished' face collapsed into pouches and folds, and of the voice, rising to shrillness, crying out, 'It's a lie, I tell you I've known him for months . . .'

Up in Orage's suite a few minutes later, and even within the loom of the gigantic American himself who in a kind of courteous self-deprecation took inches off his great height by a stoop which made him seem to hover over his interlocutor, Edward was still confused, shrinking from his own self as from an unwanted companion who had done, and done publicly, something monstrous. Reuben Lipschitz darted about the room, never able to keep still, saying, 'This boy's bright, Bayard. You'll see, it's like I told you. What does he know? Nothing! But the ideas come when he calls!' Reuben made beckoning motions with his arms. Orage smiled at Edward, a smile that said, 'Cute, ain't he?' Edward's hands were shaking from his encounter with Custer-Dwyer and the police: Orage, taking this for modesty and nervousness, put his questions gently, but in terms and with an appreciation at a glance of the whole circuit which, reminding Edward that this man had made his name first as an electrician and only secondarily in business, rising to the heights with a sort of casual ease, caused him to make an effort at self-control. It was apparently successful: twice Orage said, 'Darned ingenious.' And at the end, 'I like it. I like it very much.' Then, rolling the blue-prints, 'What about a drink?' Edward glanced at Reuben Lipschitz who shook his head violently and Edward said, 'Thank you, sir, but I must go.' 'I hope we'll meet again, then,' Orage said.

There was a telephone message on Edward's bench when he returned to the laboratory. Celia Woodreeve had rung: she had left a number and an extension number. He asked for it: a voice said, 'Murdoch, features.' Edward asked for Miss Woodreeve. She was out on a job. That night, after dinner at the Fortified Flour restaurant, he took the car out and drove north, pretending he was going to return a book to Maud and borrow another, until he was actually outside the Woodreeves' house. Only then did he remember that Celia was to be found there only at week-ends. He drove home again: at least the drive had given his restlessness an outlet. He dwelt, with a kind of desperation, on his image of Celia Woodreeve, perhaps only because it exorcized his image of Custer-Dwyer's face ruined, aged in a moment by his, Edward's, act of self-loving treachery. In his

dreams that uneasy night, the faces of Custer-Dwyer and Arthur Figgis became as one. On the Saturday afternoon Edward went back to the Woodreeves' house after having tea with Maud and his father. Since Edward's move into lodgings, Mr. Tillotson had become easier in manner with his son, and did not question his comings and goings.

At the Woodreeves' it was Celia who opened the door and, with a kind of slightly excessive brightness, said, 'Oh, Mr. Tillotson, do come in,' and, as she took his coat from him and hung it on the hall-stand, 'I'm longing to hear about the kangaroo.' 'And the emu,' Edward said.

'Of course! The emu.'

They were still in the little hall when Mr. Woodreeve came through a door at the end of it—the kitchen door as Edward was to learn when this became familiar territory—carrying a tray covered with ready-set mousetraps of the old wood and metal kind. He put down the tray to shake hands with Edward, explaining that he was starting on his evening rounds, putting down mousetraps all over the house. 'The old place is overrun with mice.' He excused himself, and bustled away with the traps, his long, bony nose, red with effort, standing out against the sickly yellow hue of his much folded skin, his white hair, untidy with the excitement of the chase, revealing patches of pink scalp. 'A matter of hygiene,' he explained, from halfway up the stairs. Celia shrugged at this as she took Edward into the sitting-room, saying, with an open hostility to her father which was embarrassing to Edward, 'He goes to meetings against fox-hunting. He gives money Mother ought to have to the League Against Cruel Sports. But this mouse-trapping is nothing but a blood sport.' Mrs. Woodreeve, sewing by the fireside, said, 'Still, they are dirty little beasts,' even before greeting Edward, who was looking, for the first time, at what was to become part of his life—the lace curtains, and beyond through the window the square patch of brown grass and beyond that again the towering, featureless brick wall, tall as the house, of the multi-track railway embankment. 'Not,' Mrs. Woodreeve said, resuming her needlework, 'that we had mice when we had One and Two.' Edward looked perplexed and Celia said, sharply, perhaps embarrassed by the whimsicality of these names, 'Mother's cats.' Edward asked what had happened to those animals, saw Mrs. Woodreeve's face flush, and asked no more questions. He told them about the kangaroo and the emu. 'They were the gift to his old home of an emigrant engine-driver, who made a fortune in

Sydney and sent them home, to give the children some idea of Australia.'

Celia said, 'I expect he thought people would believe they were a part of his achievement.' Mrs. Woodreeve said, 'If Mr. Tillotson would come to lunch tomorrow, you could go for a walk in the park.'

'In tribute to the departed Australian fauna!' Celia said. Edward said he would like to come.

Edward became a frequenter of the house at week-ends, and of concert halls with Celia who shared his own preference for pre-Beethoven music. He became oddly confused by the two kinds of love which, in the following weeks, took possession of his heart, his love for Celia and his love for her mother. Celia herself confused him; there was a hard tension between them whenever they talked, listened to music, or were in company with other people: she seemed, indeed, to defy and almost to repudiate him excepting when they were alone together. Then, she became easy to be with, sweet, gentle, readily playful. Saturdays and Sundays of that spring and summer—until the Sunday morning when they sat with Mrs. Woodreeve beside the wireless—Mr. Woodreeve having gone to an Ethical Chapel of which he was a member—and heard the Prime Minister declare war on Germany—Edward and Celia drove out into Hertfordshire and sat and walked and picnicked and made love in primrose and bluebell woods. They did not go to Goudhurst because Edward's Uncle Walter was ill, not physically ill but so deeply disturbed by doubts of his 'justification' that Aunt Sarah had made it clear that although Edward would be welcome, he must come alone. But he would not sacrifice a week-end of Celia's company.

He became absorbed not only in Celia but in the whole family. What he came to feel for Mrs. Woodreeve can perhaps be conveyed by saying that he suffered for her past: if he thought hard about her doing her ten-hour stint at the age of sixteen in the sweat-shop which employed her; Edward felt a slight but quite definite pain in the loins, as he did if, for example, he read a description of a person being burned at the stake. No doubt he was crediting her with sufferings beyond what she experienced. As well as that curious gesture with her hand at the level of her face, which to him conveyed that she found most words inadequate, her only tic was a slight twitching of her light eyebrows when she talked to anyone but a member of her immediate family circle. When people quarrelled before her she sat looking at the floor with an expression of pain on her face, and of acute embarrassment. Her wages in the sweat-shop

where she had made garments before she was married had reached eighteen shillings a week at their highest. When her first child was stillborn Mr. Woodreeve was earning thirty shillings a week. But by the time Celia was born, when Mr. Woodreeve was over forty and Mrs. Woodreeve thirty-nine, he had stopped being a linotype operator and become a Union official, a clerk to the Labour movement, and they had more money. At one time there had been a possibility of £400 a year, when Mr. Woodreeve was on the short list of Trade Union parliamentary candidates. But he had offended some powerful member of the Labour junta by that 'plain speaking' which he was proud of and which Celia said was 'plain ill-nature'.

In the house Mrs. Woodreeve was never still, she was for ever getting meals or clearing up after meals or washing or mending and making clothes. She made Mr. Woodreeve's shirts and Celia's dresses. Once she had made them to her own austere taste. But, taking pleasure in Celia's beauty and boldness (attributes to which the girl owed her salvation from her father's ambition to see her a municipal clerk or a schoolteacher), she had later come to follow Celia's own ideas and even to make use of the fashion papers which her daughter brought home occasionally. Twice a week she went to the public library, reading mostly topography. She had not seen much of England, for Mr. Woodreeve did not take her on his travels, since he could not draw expenses for her as well as himself. But she knew a surprising amount about the antiquities and beauties of her country, although rather as a sedentary geographer 'knows' Patagonia. Mr. Woodreeve was fond of the cinema and she went with him at least once a week: it seemed to Edward that films made no more impression on her than they had done on Doris.

Celia once said to Edward, 'Mother's life hasn't been much. Mostly washing-up water.' That figure of speech made a curiously deep impression on him. In idle moments at his bench, or even when talking on the telephone, he found himself no longer doodling patterns out of sine curves, or composing fantastic electronic circuits with the conventional symbols for electrical devices, but making calculations to discover how *much* washing-up water Mrs. Woodreeve had used in her life. It is perhaps not as ridiculous as it seems: it could be argued that, socially, it was the most significant thing about her, it was what the first half of the twentieth century had had to offer women like her. Edward became absurdly exasperated by the difficulty of arriving at an exact figure, as biographers, no doubt, are exasperated by the difficulty of arriving at the significant statistics for

their subjects—the exact number of young lives cut gloriously short by great captains; the exact number of soldiers given the chance to die by great statesmen. In the end he was more or less satisfied that Mrs. Woodreeve had consumed sixty-five thousand seven hundred gallons of washing-up water.

This dwelling on Mrs. Woodreeve had one disagreeable consequence: Edward had 'got over' Arthur Figgis's death but now, as if he were being prepared for the shock to come he had a relapse into remorse. It was sentimental: it seemed to him that Figgis had had nothing and that he, Edward, had taken away the man's chance to make up for it. He was aware that McFadden had been the first employer Figgis had ever had who recognized that he was man like any other and should be spared the humiliation of always being told he was not worth his pay, could not keep up with other men, and had no skill. McFadden, by appearing to consult with Figgis about his garden at Mulberry Trees, had allowed him to have self-respect. Because of Edward this happy state had lasted only a few months. Edward's state of mind about this was not in any kind of proportion, but it showed that McFadden had been right when he said, as Figgis lay between them on the floor of that intolerably hot room, that he had given himself a weight to carry.

To what extent Edward's 'knowledge' of Celia and of Mrs. Woodreeve, reached by way of a love whose growth was forced by the heated atmosphere of war, represented anything which can properly be called objective, it is impossible to say: probably he created them as he had created Doris; probably no other kind of knowledge of people by people is possible. For, if he and these two women penetrated each other with the widely refracted and distorting radiance of love, on the other hand Edward's indifference to Mr. Woodreeve enabled him to see more straightly, perhaps, but very superficially. As Edward's imagination went to work, creating this new landscape for his own use—the gigantic wall of the railway, the joyous trumpeting of passing northbound expresses drawn out into a mournful wail, the brown rooms, the grey sky reflected in the grey and oily surface of the road—and its figures, Mr. Woodreeve was, as it were, only sketched in and remained flat and, perhaps, unconvincing.

It was that whistling of passing trains which had been the occasion of Edward's first encounter with anything but the rather unpleasing surfaces of Mr. Woodreeve. They had interrupted one of those pointless conversations about the consequences of war which were general throughout Europe during those weeks, while the deafening

shriek of the Irish Packet express was drawn out into a dying fall as the train passed to its thunderous passage through Overbury Park Junction. 'Döppler's Effect' Edward said, of the sound. Mr. Woodreeve had hardly forgiven him for that a week later because, as Edward came to know, he had what can only be described as a jealous contempt for the kind of knowledge that names and defines and classifies things. He detested clarity. The way Celia put it was to call him a 'born liberal'; there was much to be said on both sides, even about the name for the locomotive whistle's dying fall. And this rejection of definition became Edward's symbol for Mr. Woodreeve in his mind's work and his heart's work of bringing the Woodreeves into the only kind of existence which is real, the one you make yourself as you go along, second by second; and then remake time and again, at every fresh physical contact, because nothing retains its reality beyond the time when it is in touch with your senses, not even the furniture of a familiar room or the features of the most familiar face. He had to make a new set of symbols to represent what he could understand of Celia's impatient adoration of her mother and her intense dislike of her father which she was for ever justifying a shade defiantly: she maintained, for example (and insisted that her father's workmates were of her opinion), that the W.E.T.S.—'and the T.U.C., come to that'—were staffed by men whom the real workers had been anxious to get rid of. 'It accounts,' she said, 'for the Labour Party being what it is. A pity it's always out of the question to vote for the others.' It had not occurred to Edward that it was out of the question to vote for the others. It had not occurred to him that it was necessary to vote for anyone or that it mattered. He was politically indifferent.

Celia's hostility to her father was a source of pain to her mother. Time and again Edward heard her say, 'Celia, you've no call to talk like that about your father. You're only here week-ends, you only have to be dutiful two days out of seven.' And to Edward, 'Her father's health isn't what it was. Well, I don't have to tell you that, it was you brought him home that night he collapsed. She ought to make allowances.'

On the Friday following the declaration of war Reuben Lipschitz came to Kinesound and both Edward and his colleague Adam Olby were sent for to Connor's office, where Mr. Lipschitz sat in Connor's swivel chair, restlessly swinging it backwards and forwards through forty-five degrees, and Connor himself sat with one buttock on the corner of his desk. Reuben never uttered any kind of greeting or

preamble to what he had to say: thus, on this occasion, he said, 'You two are being transferred to the Selectron Corporation as of Monday. O.K.?' Olby simply nodded but Edward said, 'What about the war?' He referred, of course, to the fact that he would soon be called-up; or even, perhaps, to a vague feeling that he might volunteer for service, probably in the Royal Air Force. Reuben Lipschitz said, 'What d'you think I'm talking about? Selectron's where you'll do your war work.'

'What war work?'

'You'll be told.'

Connor said, 'A lot more important than toting a rifle. Asdic research for one thing. If you know what that is.' Edward did not know what it was but he was more concerned at the moment to assert himself. He said, 'But supposing I want to join up.' To which Reuben said, 'Look, boy, you're being directed into Selectron, see? Everybody's going to be directed into something, see? Where they can do most good. Any *schlemil* can shoot a gun, but this war's going to take more than bullets.'

Olby said, 'What about pay, Mr. Lipschitz?' and Edward discovered that they would be getting much more than they had been receiving from Kinesound, and Reuben, laughing with the peculiar innocent cynicism which distinguished him, said, 'War contracts, boy. Gives us a bit of elbow-room. There's no taste in nothing.' Edward said, 'You mean I can't join up even if I want to?' As Edward was leaving the room he added, 'I've had guidance about you, boy.'

When Edward told Celia about this, which he did at dinner that evening, a scratch meal in her lodgings before a visit to the cinema, she said, 'Selectron? You're in luck.' Like most journalists, even as junior as herself, she had a certain amount of more or less unreliable information about the institutions which exercised power behind the shadow-play of manifest public life. Edward said, 'You know something about it?' All she knew was that Selectron was an N.A.E. subsidiary, small but supposed to be in the lead by reason of a number of patents which Lipschitz had bought from an independent Swiss inventor. But she had the other journalistic gift, resembling that said to be the distinction of French housewives, of making a few scraps into an apparently substantial feast. Edward allowed himself to be convinced mainly because his mind was not really on the subject of his future: he had received a subpoena to appear in court and bear witness against Major Custer-Dwyer. He wanted to tell her about it,

but he was afraid: Celia, although she took the usual freedoms of the time in matters of morality, was often censorious. Mixing, as he had begun to do, with the set of men and women which had absorbed her before she met him, Edward had discovered that they regarded, with a kind of good-natured amusement which would not, perhaps, have been conceded to a girl less beautiful, the simplicity of her failure to judge others by the same criteria as governed her own behaviour. The way her mother put it was to say that Celia 'did not make allowances'. Like her father, whom despite herself she resembled, she did not know what it was to be unjustified. The fierce contempt with which she spoke of behaviour or people that she disapproved of, and her inability or unwillingness to distinguish shades of wickedness, seemed to derive from a kind of romanticism which Edward could appreciate intellectually. But, as a guilty man frequently at odds with his self—an ambivalence inconceivable to Celia—he was bound to be afraid of it, and to fall short, in his relationship with Celia, of perfect candour. At the time, therefore, he did not tell her about the sordid little adventure which was taking him into the police-courts.

Edward's boss at Selectron, whose research department was in an old and ugly building in Clerkenwell, was a man named Elham. He was not a scientist—as the newspapers now call certain categories of industrial operatives—but a businessman, one of a dozen trustees Reuben Lipschitz employed to run his diverse enterprises, people he had picked out of subordinate positions for the nervous deference manifest in their application to boring routine tasks. They were conditioned to do his will, conditioned even to confusing it with the way of the world and with ultimate good sense and therefore morality. It was to Elham and the others that Reuben delegated certain of his own attributes which it did not suit or become him to possess but which were necessary to success. By him in person the larger gestures were made; by them the little ones. Elham was an anxious man, especially about money in small sums. During Edward's first month at Selectron he twice saw Elham, in the mirror over the wash-basin in his office, stealing six or seven matches from the box on the desk; and once, when Edward had asked for a light in Elham's office, Elham handed him a box of matches and asked for the three ha'pence.

With Adam Olby as a team-mate, Edward settled down to working out modifications and applications of the TFB to certain pulse-shaping and amplifying circuits supplied to them by the Admiralty.

They were by no means overworked and Edward began a series of calculations and experiments of his own. He wanted to build an electronic voice-fabricator: when a sound is recorded it is captured either as an undulant groove in some plastic material, or as a wavy line of light on a roll of film, or as a train of magnetic fields on a length of wire. It occurred to Edward that the series of sounds which constitutes a speech or a song had values which could be expressed mathematically; and that once so expressed they could be rendered, on a suitable apparatus, electronically; and recorded, reproduced, as sound. Adam Olby said that he had never heard of such a useless idea in his life. 'I don't care about that,' Edward said, 'it amuses me. Besides, you never know. For instance, although there have been beautiful singing voices, I suppose none has ever been perfect. I might make the perfect voices to sing, say, *Aida*. Or a voice with more hypnotic power than bloody old Adolf's.'

When he told Celia about it, and put the case of the operatic voices as an example, she was contemptuous. 'The thing about singing is the feeling, the emotion, the heart the singer puts into her song. You're not going to tell me you can do that by machinery.' 'In theory you certainly can. When you say "emotion", I translate that as "harmonics". Why is a tune played on a good fiddle more moving than the same tune played on a bad one? Richer harmonics. As far as I can see, it should be possible to find out, for instance, what are the harmonics in Gigli's voice which are tear-jerking or soul-shaking, and enrich them to the optimum value.'

'Rubbish,' Celia said, 'it's an absolutely ridiculous idea. The values of art are imponderable.'

Edward knew that this was one of the things Celia would not argue about; she was emotionally involved and, if he persisted, would become angry and talk him down. He looked at her Nephertite profile, her silky hair, the exquisite grace of her beautifully held body, and laughed, as if he were dismissing what he himself had said as whimsical nonsense. But it so excited him that he wanted to talk to somebody about it, somebody who would understand. From his office he telephoned to Mendoza's and asked for Mr. Pardoner, to be told that he had been recalled to the Navy and that his address could not be given. They offered to forward a letter, but Edward did not take the trouble to write.

On the Saturday following this failure to talk to Mr. Pardoner, Celia found Edward very low-spirited and absent-minded during the walk in the park to which petrol restrictions had reduced them. She

was kind and gentle in trying to get him to say what was the matter with him and it was only then, at last, two weeks after his appearance in the police-court, that he told her about the Custer-Dwyer case. He stammered and blundered through the first part; she interrupted once to say, 'You were crazy to use that place. We get half a dozen cases a week reported from there.' 'I didn't know that,' Edward said, and, resuming where she had interrupted him, 'David was in court. He wouldn't even look at me. Not that I blame him. Custer-Dwyer had two lawyers, one of them a pale, sniggering solicitor I'd met at David's years ago, the other a man named Smedley . . .'

'Somebody was spending freely.'

'He earned what he got. I shall have nightmares about it. He started quite conversationally by asking me whether it was not a fact that I had known the accused for a long time, more than a year. I said I had. Then he asked me whether the accused had not simply been greeting me as an old friend he had not seen for some time and giving me news of a young woman in whom I was interested. I wanted to say yes, that was exactly true. But it was like I've said, I was caught up, I couldn't do it, I hated him for what I was doing to him, I just went on lying. Smedley actually accused me of lying, put it as a question. He's a very dark man with a long, ascetic face and it looked enormous, a threatening gargoyle as he leaned towards me and said it . . . "Aren't you telling a pack of lies, Mr. Tillotson?" I said No and even I could hear that it sounded like Yes. They had David in the box and he told about Doris. The police lawyer tried to stop it, but Smedley got enough over to make it clear that I was probably acting spitefully . . .'

'What was the outcome?'

'Case dismissed.'

Celia shrugged. 'A case of all being well that ends well.'

'Is that how it seems to you?'

For a moment she looked at Edward in silence. The purity of her features and the golden radiance of her head was a reproach to him. She said, 'If you don't want to suffer remorse, you don't do these things. It's very simple, really. Let's walk, I'm getting cold.'

They walked home briskly; Edward resented the tone of contempt in which Celia had judged him. Certainly, what he had done was contemptible, but for some reason which he could not have explained he felt that he deserved sympathy, not contempt, as if he were one of the victims of what he had done, or as if what seemed to have been done by him had not altogether been done by him.

He did not say anything about his resentment until they were in Overbury Park Road, and then he began, 'It's all very well for you to say——' But Celia interrupted him, saying, 'That's the doctor's car outside our house.' Neither of them said any more but they hurried. Celia's face lit with happiness when her mother opened the door and she said, 'Thank God there's nothing wrong with *you*.' Mrs. Woodreeve said, 'Your father's been taken very queer.'

2

WHEN the bombing of London started Edward and Adam Olby joined the same ambulance depot of the Civil Defence Service. On duty-nights when there were no calls for his ambulance, Edward slept on a stretcher in the underground garage. He was at first very much ashamed to discover that he was terrified of raids. It seemed to him that nobody else was as frightened as he was. One of his mates during the nights of terror and destruction was a girl named Alice who had been a model in a dress house; she was slender, fair and silky-looking, she appeared to be without fear, and Edward envied her. But it was not her example, nor that of scores of other seemingly unfrightened people, which enabled him to overcome his fear, but a kind of obstinate contempt for the self which was so intent upon being saved alive. This contempt was, in a way, an opposite to his Uncle Walter's preoccupation with *his* self: Edward had no such intimation as Walter Tillotson's that God wanted him to save himself because he might be among the justified. His terror did not abate, but was stimulated by every serious 'incident'. One night he was sent out, with Alice, to what had been reported as an 'incident' in a street off Russell Square. He drove past groups of flaming houses and over the manifold serpentine obstructions of the fire-fighters' hoses. Bombs were falling in sticks of five on both sides of his route and every explosion was the one before that which would surely kill him. When they got to their destination there was no 'incident'; the street had not been hit, but there was a gigantic old man in a basement bedroom who said that he had been a physician and knew he was suffering from acute appendicitis and must be taken to hospital at once. He was green and sweating and abjectly afraid of dying whether of peritonitis or by a bomb. Edward and Alice were not strong enough to carry him up the steps to street level—he must

have been six foot six inches and he was corpulent. They could not even have managed a stretcher, so steep was the rise. When the old man realized this, although he was huddled over his pain, he got out of bed and crawled up the steps on his hands and knees, with Edward pushing him from behind.

Edward was filled with contempt for this abject surrender of dignity. It seemed to him that old people should be prepared to die rather than go to such lengths to preserve their lives. There was a kind of ugliness in such clinging to the last vestige of one's count of years when the young were dying by their thousands; but, worse than that, as he shoved away at the huge and fleshy old buttocks clad in enormous cotton pyjamas, Edward suddenly discovered that if there was a God—his uncle's or any other—inflicting the horrors of peace, let alone war, on mankind, then he, Edward, would certainly not give Him the satisfaction of showing too thoroughgoing an attachment to a life which must have been given as a monstrous practical joke. In that case it was all the more important to show no fear.

A week later, one of the station ambulances was hit by a bomb while taking on people wounded by an earlier bomb. It was at a small Underground station, the second bomb was a large one, and it killed fourteen people, all women. Edward was sent out, but not with Alice, who had been with the first ambulance and was one of the dead. When he reached the scene the station was on fire, but there were still many people, some injured and others only shocked, to be brought out. One of the first things he saw as he went in with the heavy rescue men was that the principal steel beams of roof structure must soon collapse. But before that happened, over thirty people were brought to the surface and saved. Driving to the hospital with seven injured people, Edward discovered that while very busily engaged in the exhausting work—every moment more dangerous—of saving other people, he had not been afraid: he had not been aware of himself at all. He gave himself no marks for this, knowing that he would not have gone into that hell if he had seemed to have any choice. But he was interested in this discovery about his own nature. He even told Celia about it, but she only said, 'Darling, everyone knows that—it's the people with nothing to do who suffer agonies of terror. The best thing to be in this bloody war is a soldier. A soldier isn't an I: he's part of an Us.'

In the course of the following months Edward gained the upper hand over his cowardice; but he thought of that cowardice as his self, and of his victory as a denial of his self, a curtailing of his self's

liberty. As if in reaction, he became rather aggressive in the laboratories and offices of Kinesound. To his own surprise he discovered that his self knew very well what it was about. Edward's assertiveness, his almost quarrelsome propagation of his own ideas and his own methods of work, were counted to him for the assurance of conscious ability. He was promoted over Olby's head, given two assistants, and responsibility for a number of research projects. When, in good faith, he pointed out, as usual at any important juncture of his working life, that he was technically unqualified, this was taken for the hypocritical candour of a man so sure of himself that he feels he can afford to be more honest than is necessary.

Edward had been in enjoyment of place and good pay for almost a year when the Research Department of the Royal Naval Wireless Telegraphy School, at Haslemere, asked Elham to send them a technician to sit in at an important conference. This conference was to be composed of Special Branch naval officers who had been using, at sea, some apparatus originated by the W/T School, developed by Selectron, and manufactured by a firm called Llewellyn and Powell. The apparatus had not been performing satisfactorily.

Elham sent Edward, partly because he had worked on the gear in question, and partly because he had his own motor-car.

Edward drove into Surrey: people who worked at a certain level for any of Lipschitz's firms did not have to worry about petrol. The Naval Establishment he wanted was not in W/T School. It turned out to be an eighteenth-century manor-house called Brandon's Pitch five miles from the town. From the back of the house rose a long hill, once fine lawn with clumps of trees and shrubs, now a village of Nissen huts. On the top of this hill, commanding views of the countryside, was a folly in the form of a Greek temple and rather larger than such pretty summer-houses usually are. It was there, despite every inconvenience and protest, that the officer Edward had come to see, and who was known as S.S.O., had installed his personal office. From its back windows you could see a little valley with a stream where monkey-musk grew in summer, and a Chinese bridge. This had not yet been invaded by Nissen huts and S.S.O.—which stood for Senior Scientific Officer—had saved it from the County War Agricultural Committee by stocking it out of his own pocket with three Jersey cows which, milked by a Wren of rural antecedents, provided the establishment with milk.

These facts Edward did not learn until, five minutes after his

arrival, he was shown into the office whose door bore the letters S.S.O. and, to his surprise and keen pleasure, found himself face to face with Mr. Pardoner, in the uniform of a Commander R.N.V.R. —and with small tufts of hair growing just below his cheek-bones, which, from time to time, he touched with his finger-tips and an air of sardonic complacency.

After they had greeted each other and each briefly explained how he came to be there, Commander Pardoner told Edward about his establishment, dwelling with particular satisfaction on his small herd of cows and his W.R.N.S. dairymaid. 'Their lordships in their wisdom, Tillotson, tried to stop my venture into farming. Two things thwarted them, however: by an ancient rule officers and ratings are allowed to keep livestock on board provided the captain does not object. I am the officer commanding this ship and I don't object. The other thing is that there is no question of my being an admiral: they are going to restore my R.N. commission, but a four-ring pension will do me very nicely. And I shall not, when I get it, emulate the great Ulysses and take an oar on my shoulder and walk inland until I meet a native who asks me what it is I'm carrying. I shall live in a bungalow near Folkestone, play the organ in church, and write a book called *Calculus for C—s*.'

At Mendoza's Mr. Pardoner would not have used such a word; yet it was not out of character. Commander Pardoner was recognizably the same person as Mr. Pardoner, but, as it were, louder and larger, as if he had had to swell to fill his uniform.

Brandon's Pitch was on the Admiralty establishment as H.M.S. *Tungsten* and Commander Pardoner was in very high spirits because the Germans were claiming to have sunk his 'ship'. 'That fellow Haw-Haw,' he waved a monitor's report on the *Deutschlandsender* transmissions at Edward and then, reading aloud in a fair imitation of Joyce's nasal snarl, went on, 'Gairmany calling, this is Gairmany calling . . . on the night of the fourteenth our undersea-boat U one-four-seven, Captain Willi Luft, operating within the ridiculously inefficient British minefield off the Isle of Wight, torpedoed and sank the new metal class destroyer H.M.S. *Tungsten*. There were no survivors. Extraordinary chap, isn't he? However, to work . . .' And Commander Pardoner took Edward into an adjoining room where half a dozen young destroyer officers were waiting for them.

As a result of this conference Edward was put into the uniform of a lieutenant R.N.V.R. and sent to sea for a month. He took part in a

battle against some E-boats, and found that he could behave with courage. Then he returned, worked for another month, until late every night, on the faulty apparatus, and when that work was completed he was given permission to work on a project of his own, the application of the TFB to a radar device called the Plan Position Indicator—PPI for short. This assignment received job number 45/42.

Edward was now working very long hours and although the battle for London had long been over and raids were fewer, he was still on duty four nights a week. Celia had no fixed hours of work: she was on call by her newspaper twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. She had 'covered' scores of the worst air-raid 'incidents' and had been courageous in danger; but the spectacle of helpless people whose responsibility for the state of war was negligible being massacred, had had a serious effect on her. Her pity for the victims turned to rage against their killers, and she made very little distinction between the German government, and the leaders on her own side. The war was an atrocious outrage, *they* were all in it together, and if Hitler was a scoundrel, Churchill was not much better. As Edward's mind was less detached from received opinion, and he found it easier to be a patriot than a human being judging in isolation from the herd, he and Celia avoided talking about the war. They clung together against it as the principal enemy of their happiness. But they clung in silence. They did not talk about their love: they acted it.

* * *

In the course of one of those rare raids on London which followed the failure of the main attack, a stick of five bombs fell on Overbury Park Road, destroying most of its houses but leaving the Woodreeves' very little damaged. Mr. Woodreeve had been bed-ridden since the evening when Edward and Celia had come back from the park to find the doctor's car outside the house. The basement had been turned into a bedroom, and either because this provided a measure of shelter or because both Mr. and Mrs. Woodreeve were too concentrated on his sickness to pay much attention to any other danger, neither of them showed fear of bombs.

Edward was off duty on the night following the damage to Overbury Park and he went to the Woodreeves', for Celia had moved back there following the destruction of her own lodgings and also because her mother needed some help with Mr. Woodreeve. Edward saw the doctor's car driving away from the Woodreeves' house as he

came in sight of it. The whole neighbourhood had been transformed by the big raid. Formerly, Overbury Park Road had run like a slate-grey canal of slack water between very tall, flat-fronted houses of grey or yellow brick. (Edward always remembered it as a place one heard as well as saw—the swishing noise of tyres on the kind of wetness you get from slowly condensing fog.) The slice of sky between the houses reflected the colour of the road. It must sometimes have been fine in Overbury Park, sometimes summer; but he never thought of it so. As one of a hundred like it, the Woodreeves' house had looked as much in place as a book on a book-shelf. Now it stuck up like the beginning of something never finished and the road, unbordered, ran with an air of madness through a rubble desert where, of course, no loosestrife, no buddleia, no nettles had yet begun the work of natural reclamation.

Mrs. Woodreeve opened the door to him and he now knew her well enough to glance not at her face but at her right hand: the arthritic little finger was curled into the palm and, mechanically, she was moving all the others as if playing an invisible piano. But the curled little finger did not move: she never could move it when Mr. Woodreeve had been, as she called it, 'creating', or when something else was wrong in her household.

'How is he?' Edward said.

'They don't tell me. I think he's dying.'

Edward nodded: he had nothing to say because there were such large areas of reserve in her own spirit. If she was sorry it was for her husband's pain, and it might be because there was nobody whose pain she was not sorry for and his was much nearer to her than any other; they had been together for thirty years. She had told Edward, in a rare moment of bitterness, of disgust with herself, 'He's in pain and it's a demand he makes on me, a reproach to me, as if he enjoyed it because he can make it a kind of triumph over me, a proof that I haven't done right by him.' Celia said that it was because her mother had ceased to love her husband and had lost her respect for him that she felt thus bitterly guilty of his pain. Edward told her that that was a kind of judgement nobody had the right to make: 'I don't think we ever know anything about other people excepting when we recognize ourselves in them; and not much even then.'

When Celia came down she was already wearing gloves and had a scarf tied over her head, so that Edward knew they were to go out. Her mother said, 'Don't be long. Your father . . .'

'All right, mother, all right! I just want a breath of air. We'll go and feed the kangaroo.'

This had become the formula for 'we will go for a walk in the park' but when they were outside Edward said, 'Do you mind if we walk round to my father's? I couldn't get them on the phone this morning. I had better see if they're all right.'

Celia agreed, but rather curtly. She and Edward had been only once to see Mr. Tillotson and Maud, and afterwards it had become obvious to Edward that it would not do to go often. His father was the sort of man for whom Celia would certainly not 'make allowances' and she evidently found Maud both affected in her conversation and rather slatternly in her appearance. Edward had been careful not to ask Celia what she 'thought' of his people: they had been silent for a long time after leaving his father's house after that first visit; then Celia had said, 'Don't you resent her—Mrs. Olantigh?'

'Resent her? She's not a bad sort.'

'I daresay. But after all, your mother——'

'You have to be tolerant,' Edward said. To which Celia replied, 'Do you? Aren't we a lot *too* tolerant? Isn't tolerance apt to become the enemy of decent behaviour?'

'No,' Edward said, 'I don't think so.'

They had not been to see Edward's family again, but now they walked towards the house briskly and in silence. They should have been able to see the house from the corner where they turned into the street, but it was not there. The state of affairs was the reverse of Overbury Park Road—most of the houses were untouched, but there was this gap, through which a gasometer and a cluster of factory chimneys were visible, where Mr. Tillotson's house and its neighbours on each side had stood.

Although Edward had seen a great deal of raid damage and was used to living in a partly ruined city, this sudden disappearance of the house he had been born and raised in was inexpressibly shocking. The idea that his father and Maud were probably dead was a secondary shock, although no doubt the more enduring. Without a word to Celia he began to run. He found four or five heavy rescue men still poking and lifting among the ruins, but instead of questioning them he stood and stared. He could not at once face the exposure of his feelings to these strangers. Celia caught up with him almost at once; she saw that he was livid and that there were tears in his eyes and even beginning to run down his cheeks, and did not suspect that he

was weeping for himself, because his base was gone, his retreat cut off. She asked the men what had happened to the people in the houses and was told that the two outside ones had been empty, their tenants in the Services or evacuated: two bodies, a man and a woman, had been taken out of the middle house.

Edward listened to this and then turned and walked away. Celia followed him. He had stopped crying but his face was set. She took his hand and held it. They walked aimlessly for half an hour before Celia persuaded him to report to the police-station and find out what steps he was required to take. From there she went with him to the mortuary. When he came out from identifying the bodies, they had started to walk away when Edward suddenly caught hold of the iron railings which protected an area and was sick on the pavement. There was a special constable patrolling the street and he stopped and said to Celia, 'Your friend can't do that here.' 'Don't talk like a bloody fool,' Celia said, with such ferocity that the man flushed and walked on.

When they got back to Overbury Park Road, and Celia had told her mother what had happened, Mrs. Woodreeve said that Edward ought to stay the night. He was grateful to her, and helped Celia to make up the bed in what had been her parents' room. When it was bed-time Celia went up with him to see that he had everything he wanted, and as she was about to leave him she said, 'I can't bear to see you looking so unhappy. There's nothing one can say or do——'.

'It's funny,' Edward said, 'I feel lonely. It's no good pretending I was fond of my father. I was quite fond of Maud but I despised him. And now I feel as if by doing so I did him some frightful wrong and can never be forgiven.'

'That's morbid, Edward,' Celia said. 'If—a person was despicable it's no use pretending he wasn't because he's dead.'

'The idea that people die and it obviously doesn't matter frightens me,' he said.

She said nothing. This was a thing both of them knew they were beginning to feel and which they did not talk about, any more than they talked about their love. When they drew close together they had nothing to say to each other; or, if they had, no words not long worn out. It seems, if books are anything to go by, that, time was, people exchanged noble words about their deep feelings. Edward and Celia did not. For his part, he was learning to suspect words not only in the present, but in the past. It seemed to him that

the whole of language when applied to feelings, and perhaps when applied to objects too, was a sort of fallacy. He discovered a terrible truth in the notion of the word as creative. Surely it made the thing it pretended to designate? He was coming to have a feeling that the moment you start talking about love you bring into existence something which it is not. He thought it was experience of air-raid 'Incidents', Celia's as a reporter, his own as an ambulance driver, which had brought both of them secretly to a conclusion which they did not discuss but which each sensed in the other: that, except presumably for Christians, it is ridiculous (though essential) to go on pretending that human beings matter. Death was being served out wholesale and it quite obviously did not matter. The harvest destroys countless millions of ears of wheat: thereafter there are more than ever; nor is their essential quality, their 'wheatness', impaired or modified. Celia, as well as Edward, took a kind of grim, unhappy pride in their new detachment. But Edward knew that this was *hubris*: to do without the pretences, to dare to perceive that words are not true, was mortally dangerous; because although they were not true they were the only symbols we had and by denying them you rejected the rites whereby you continually conjured into being the world of feeling you had agreed to regard as real.

After the silence following Edward's confession, Celia said, 'Shall I come to you later?'

It seemed to Edward that she made this suggestion in the spirit of a charitable person visiting the sick, and he said, 'Ought we—here?'

'I think Mother knows.'

'Yes, but all the same——'

'She'll be downstairs, with Father.'

Celia came to him when the house seemed to be sleeping. She did her best to make her love-making into an act of sympathy; but as always happened when their love-making was prompted by anything but selfishness, instead of uniting them, it set each apart in an isolation so complete that it seemed as if love could have no enemy more powerful than lust. They were both very tired and fell into an exhausted sleep that was not broken by the air-raid warning which roused Mrs. Woodreeve at six o'clock the following morning. Edward was a lighter sleeper than Celia; although the raid warning did not wake him, the 'raiders past' siren, which followed almost at once—the warning was probably a false alarm—did. He had his eyes open when Mrs. Woodreeve, her hair braided like a little girl's, and wear-

ing a grey flannel dressing-gown with a scalloped collar, came into the room. She was carrying a cup of tea. 'It's early,' she said, 'but I had to be up and I thought——' At that moment she saw Celia's head on the pillow next to Edward's, and lowering her eyes and flushing, she backed out of the room, taking the tea with her and shutting the door after her.

She shut the door rather noisily, which woke Celia, who said, as if even in sleep she had become aware that the manner of her awakening was not to be untroubled, 'What's the matter?' Guiltily, as if the responsibility was his, Edward said, 'Your mother came in with tea for me.' Celia sat up in bed and said, 'Oh, God!' Edward had started to dress: he stood by the door, hesitating to go to the bathroom in case he might meet Mrs. Woodreeve. Celia said, 'Damn, damn, damn!' Outside the bedroom door, he could hear Mrs. Woodreeve getting breakfast. He had an impulse to speak to her first, before Celia could do so: shaved, but without collar and tie, he went and knocked on the door of Celia's own room, to which she had returned, and said, 'Bathroom's free.' Then he went down to the kitchen. He said, as he opened the door and saw Mrs. Woodreeve at the gas stove putting bacon into the frying-pan, 'How is he?'

'Much the same,' Mrs. Woodreeve said, with a kind of tinny brightness. She did not look at him. Her hair was still in braided plaits and she was still wearing her flannel dressing-gown. Edward stared at the floor and said, 'Of course, we're going to be married, you know.'

'I wouldn't want to interfere,' Mrs. Woodreeve said.

'It's not a question of interference,' Edward said, 'I mean, we were going to be married anyway, only what with the war and that——'

'You'd better call Celia,' Mrs. Woodreeve said, 'or this bacon'll spoil and there's no more till next week.'

3

WHEN Edward told Celia what he had said to her mother, she was angry. She said, 'You can't unmake a mistake by making another one.' It was apparent from her tone that she had begun to utter this objection seriously and only half-way through it had decided that she ought to make it sound like a joke; by the time she had finished

speaking it she was not sure that it was not a joke. It was in much the same confused spirit that Edward said. 'You'll have to marry me whether you want to or not. I would not dream of upsetting your mother, who's worth ten of you.' He was not certain that he did not mean it.

During the next few days, however, Edward's sentimental life had to give way to a matter of business.

The job which was known in the laboratories by the number 45/42 had been brought to a quick and successful conclusion by the second and last of those strokes of 'intuition' (close, keen observation and intense attention) which influenced the whole of his life. A week or two later he asked Elham, quite casually, what had happened to the work. He was told that when he had finished his share of a job, he had no more business with it; this was not said offensively and Edward would have thought no more about it, but having to go to Haslemere for a day, to see Commander Pardoner, Edward had asked, as he was leaving and simply for something to say, how S.S.O.'s subordinates were getting on with 'our job 45/42'.

'Hasn't come our way. What is it, Tillotson?'

'Adaptation of my feed-back to Plan Position Indicator focusing.'

'You've done something on that? We could use it.'

That evening, when Edward again asked Elham about the job, the manager's tone was at once so equivocal and so rude that Edward lost his temper and said that if he were not told exactly what had happened to his work in this case, he was going to make trouble for someone.

'Mainly yourself, Tillotson. This is top secret.'

'Balls! Either you tell me or I phone S.S.O. and advise him to make a few inquiries.'

'Get out of my office!'

When the angry manager sent for Edward again, Lipschitz was with him and Elham left them alone.

Lipschitz was always a difficult man to deal with because nobody ever thinks of a spiritualist as being an effectual person. Reuben was; nobody more so; and what you had to learn was that whether he came to a meeting citing Brendan Bracken at the Ministry of Information as his authority for a certain course, or Beaverbrook at the Ministry of Supply, or Oliver Cromwell in limbo or wherever it is the spirits live, to him there was no difference, the authority was

equally valid. No doubt there was a great deal of sense in this. This time, however, he did not begin by an account of a session he had had with the emperor Napoleon. He looked at Edward across Elham's untidy desk and said, 'I got you in here to work for us in our way. And if we do business with Admiralty we *do* it our way. It's not your department. If you think you can stick your nose into the administration of this outfit, you're *mashugah*.'

'Talk English, Reuben,' Edward said.

'Crazy, boy, *crazy*! If you're worried about how Admiralty can get on with their war without your little bit of help, you know what you can do about it.'

'You're all mixed up, Reuben. Telling me you'll kick me out of here into the Navy isn't a threat. It's a promise.'

Reuben saw that Edward meant it, especially when he added 'The best month for me since the war started was the one at sea, with that "D" Flotilla.'

'Fire-eater, eh? Fancy yourself with gold rings round your arm?' Reuben leant towards him, straining against the edge of the desk, and hit the blotter with his soft little hand. 'Where's your patriotism? You're worth twenty of those fancy types, in here, and you know it.' He glowered for a moment, effectively despite the comedian's eyebrows, and said, 'But you don't know the facts of life.'

'I'll guess at one lot, though,' Edward said, adopting Reuben's own manner, 'I think you've filed away job 45/42 for post-war reference. I think you're dreaming about post-war television. I think you know that if the Admiralty get this gadget, the Americans will have it within a matter of weeks. I think you reckon that could cost you a lot of the money which this thing can be worth in five, ten years . . .'

'And you think,' Reuben interrupted, 'that you won't get your cut.' And, addressing an imaginary interlocutor, or perhaps one of his spirits, 'But this boy's sharp! At twenty-four he's outsmarting me!' And to Edward, shooting a pointing finger across the desk, 'But not quite bright enough! Edward, you should know you can trust me. Your poor father, rest his soul, wouldn't've made such a mistake.'

Edward turned from him and went towards the door. He said, 'We don't talk the same language, Reuben. I'm going to phone S.S.O.' Edward faced him to say it. For a long time they stared at each other. Then Reuben took up the phone and said to the girl on the PBX, 'Get me S.S.O. Haslemere, Miss.' Edward sat down and

waited. They said nothing. Edward heard the conversation and when it was finished Lipschitz said, 'Satisfied?'

'Perfectly.'

As a result of this incident, Elham came into the laboratory two days later, watched in silence until Edward had finished monitoring a new pulse-shaping circuit on the oscilloscope, and then said, 'You're to go down to Haslemere this pip-emma and see S.S.O.'

'What's he want?' Edward said, making a drawing in his notebook; he turned away from Elham to Adam Olby and said, 'It won't do. Try another six noughts one microfarads.' Elham walked out of the room without answering Edward's question.

It was a fine day and Edward liked having to see Commander Pardoner who, when Edward arrived, had nothing amusing to say, however, and began on business at once.

'We're very impressed with your adaptation of TFB to the PPI, Tillotson. You'll recall that we hadn't heard of it the last time you were here, when you asked after it. We've had the drawings and calculations and the prototype, since then.' He pushed some papers across the desk to Edward and added, in an only slightly burlesque version of a naval officer's manner, 'Carry on smoking if you want to.' Edward shook his head: Pardoner did not smoke, on the grounds that he did not want to add to either Mr. Mendoza's or the Chancellor's profits. Smoking in the company of a non-smoker made Edward feel contemptible. Mechanically, he picked up one of the drawings and Commander Pardoner said, 'Your work, of course.'

'Olby did these finished drawings. As you know, I'm an amateur. The idea is mine, and the calculations.'

Pardoner nodded and said, 'Look at the back of number two, will you?'

Puzzled, Edward did so: it appeared to be blank until S.S.O. said 'Bottom left corner' and Edward saw a faint pencil scribble in his own writing—*Monica rang. Dentist not tomorrow but Friday the 13th.* He smiled and said, 'Monica is Olby's wife. I suppose I had this on my table when the phone rang and I took the message for him. I'm sorry we forgot to tidy up.'

'I see. It was unlike you, if I may say so, very unlike.' Commander Pardoner opened a drawer and took out a calendar and handed it across the desk and said, 'Find me a Friday the thirteenth.'

Edward glanced at his face, which was deliberately grave; at the same moment Edward realized what Commander Pardoner thought

he had done: there had been no Friday the 13th since July; S.S.O. was under the impression that the pencilled memorandum had been left deliberately un-erased, a hint that Selectron had been withholding plans which might be more profitably developed in peacetime. Edward decided that there was no need to undeceive him: he looked up from the calendar and said, 'July.'

'Quite so. None since,' S.S.O. said and, taking back the blueprint, 'Thanks for the tip, Tillotson.'

No more was said about it. S.S.O. was not a man to question an underling about his employers' goings-on, and was probably too experienced even to 'take the matter up at a higher level'. He talked about development plans for the new device until tea came and, when they were served, took a noisy sip from his cup and said, 'How would you like a change of ship?'

'Depends on what you mean, sir.'

'I'd like you working for me.'

'Here?'

Pardoner's look was sharp: there had been in Edward's tone something of his ulterior thought—that he would lose the only advantage he recognized in his reserved status, that of seeing Celia, who—'for Mother's sake'—had now promised to marry him 'soon', almost every day. S.S.O. said, 'No. Your base would be Llewellyn and Powell's, who do most of our first development production. You'd have an office there. You'd be shopping around a good deal.'

'At their factory in Wales? It's in the Dovey valley, isn't it, near Machynlleth?'

'That would be one of the places you'd visit. But your office would be in London. Well?'

'I'll do whatever you advise, sir. But what would my work be?'

'What the Americans call trouble-shooting. I am not satisfied we're getting things through as quickly as we could. New things, I mean. You have a sharp eye, Tillotson, and you know the gear.'

'You know better than anyone that I have no degree or qualification of any kind. My TFB was a stroke of luck.'

'It was, and I don't think you're likely to have many more. But I don't want a scientist, I want someone with *nous*.'

Edward knew that he ought to have said, 'You think I left that pencil note on the drawing deliberately, or even invented the message. I didn't. It was a genuine oversight.' What he actually said was, 'If I'm to be working for you, where do Llewellyn and Powell come into it?'

Commander Pardoner sat back and said, 'That is the marrow of this bone,' and, 'Supposing I simply ask for you. You'll be an Admiralty civilian, with no establishment and say three hundred a year. What do Selectron pay you?'

'Five hundred.'

'Powel will pay you seven-fifty if you ask for it. Then I ask him to second you to me, we get Admiralty permission, and Powel makes his own arrangements with Admiralty.'

'You've arranged this so that I don't lose by it, is that it, sir?'

'Why should you lose by it?'

'I don't know, sir. Most people have to do what they're told in this war, and take what they're given.'

'Have you any deep and powerful yearning to serve unrewarded, Tillotson?'

'No, sir. I'm willing to do what's required of me. But . . . '

'But?'

'It sounds odd, but there'd be compensations in being at sea and in uniform. It seems I'm not to do that. Well, if I have to be a civilian, I'd as soon do well out of it.'

'Good. It's as I thought. I have mentioned the possibility to Powel, who is by way of being a friend of mine. No, that's too strong, such men have no friends. Let's say that we compose a mutual assistance partnership. Well, what do you say?'

'Yes, of course, and I'm very grateful to you.'

It is possible that if Reuben Lipschitz had been in England, Edward's transfer to Llewellyn and Powel would not have been so easy. But Reuben was in America buying films in bulk for the entertainment of the forces. And all that Elham said was, 'Well, really, I don't know I'm sure——.'

Powel, ostensibly Edward's new employer, was impressive. Describing him to Celia, Edward said, 'He's nine feet tall and a yard wide, with a head like the Belvedere Apollo——'

'I don't believe you know what the Belvedere Apollo looks like.'

'Don't pick on me like that. I mean——' Edward went on to describe a nose which was perfectly straight from a noble brow to a wide, firm upper lip, a close cap of prematurely grey curls, and wide-set grey eyes, perfectly matched as to shape but——

'But what?' Celia said. 'I believe you make up things about the people you know.' This was so nearly true that Edward was silenced. He wished it had not been Celia who said it. Shortly afterwards she had a chance to see Powel for herself. Celia had made up her mind

that they should be properly engaged. When they decided to celebrate Celia said she wanted him to take her to *Flaubert's*. Edward, remembering Doris, flushed. If Celia wondered why, she said nothing. They went to *Flaubert's*. Powel happened to be there, and at the first chance that Celia had to comment on him what she said was, 'You never mentioned his over-bite.'

It was a fact that the lower part of Powel's face did not quite match the upper part; there was a falling-off. And in alcoholic relaxation the points of two snow-white teeth rested on and dented the moist redness of the slack lower lip, giving the whole face the look of a lesser predator's, yet not so much weakening as debasing it. It was something he was conscious of as a blemish because as a rule the lower lip was held forward to cover the teeth, and it was that tension which gave the face its customary and intimidating pugnacity. But this pugnacity was not apparent as he passed their table that evening, saw Edward, glanced at Celia, and paused, saying, 'Ed! I didn't know you frequented *Flaubert's*.'

Edward had only been at Llewellyn and Powel's for a month; Powel's use of 'Ed' was not a mark of particular favour but of Powel's admiration for American manners. Edward, who was learning to use this same style when it suited Powel's mood, and which Powel himself called, for some reason, 'joshing', said, 'Oh, I don't. So there's no need to wonder where the money comes from and to start investigating my dealings with our sub-contractors.'

'Me? First place, I'm not your real boss. Second place, I never stop a guy doing the best he can for himself. Introduce me.'

'Celia, may I present Mr. Powel? Mr. Ezekiel Powel. Mr. Powel, Miss Woodreeve. Miss Woodreeve is my—my betrothed.'

'I'm very happy to meet you, Miss Woodreeve,' Powel said; 'I'm Zeke to my friends,' he went on, and Edward supposed that the American flavour about this, almost the American folk-lore flavour, made tolerable and even desirable what would otherwise have been merely absurd. Powel smiled and went on, 'What was that our friend called you again?'

'His *betrothed*, Mr. Powel. We don't see why we should use words like *fiancée*, do you? After all, to hell with the French, they wouldn't even fight the dam' war for us.'

'There's Flaubert, though,' Powel said, 'he's a frog.'

'We make an exception in his case,' Edward said, keeping it up, 'owing to his unrivalled connections in the black market.'

When Powel had joined his host or guest at his own table, Celia

made that point about his over-bite, and Edward said, 'The problem is, did natural pugnacity lead him to thrust out his lower lip, or did the need to cover his over-bite make him as pugnacious as the face it makes him pull?'

'Character shapes the face,' she said.

'That's the classic view. I don't believe it. I believe we wait till we see what we look like and then start being like that. I congratulate you on catching the right tone with him so promptly.'

'It's practice,' she said. 'When Englishmen say they're happy to meet me with an accent like a good repertory actor playing an American, there's a special convention for talking to them. You're not so bad at it yourself.'

'He's a good deal more than a stage American,' Edward objected.

'Obviously,' Celia said and, watching Powel across the room as he talked earnestly to the man he was dining with, 'Yes, a collector's piece. There's a sort of . . . of *conurbanity* in his manner . . . Edward, why are we interested in Mr. Powel? He is large and handsome, but only another business man. He's not as pretty as me, or as you for that matter; and certainly not as intelligent.'

'You're wrong. He is portentous. He's not just *another* business man, he's *the* other business man.'

'Now you're shooting the wrong line. Remember, please: *I* am the witty one; *you* are serious-minded. We must begin as we mean to go on. Put me in the picture using a simple and direct style.'

'Whenever there is an account in the papers of elaborate frauds, of long-firm swindles, of ennobled financiers in trouble for a spot of bond forging, of secret mergers, spectacular promotions, you will find a reference to "another well-known business man" who is never named. Powel is that man. He is what is called "coming". He will be quite here when this brawl is over.' Celia looked at him curiously when he had finished speaking: she seemed slightly taken aback. She said, 'Edward, you're changing. I'm not sure I like it.'

'As Powel himself would say, I'm catching on fast.'

'Well, all right—provided you can let go when you want to.'

Edward had a bench and a stool in Llewellyn and Powel's London laboratories, but the only work he did there was tinkering with his voice-fabricator. His recognized work was nearly all for Commander Pardoner's department and in that work he was obliged to use an air of authority beyond what was justified by what Commander Pardoner called his 'terms of reference'.

'You see, Tillotson,' Commander Pardoner had gone on to

explain, 'I need someone who can appear to carry weight but whom I can instantly and treacherously repudiate if necessary. That is the art of success in a hierarchy.'

Edward was never sure whether to take this seriously or not. But the hollowness of his authority in putting pressure upon industrial suppliers which might at any moment be repudiated, if not exactly by his old friend, then by that friend's politically sensitive superiors, was teaching him to bluff. The matter of his bluffing was well within his own capacity; the manner was to seek. He took the best model to hand: Powel, whom Edward found himself understanding yet not quite despising. It is enormously difficult to despise success: Edward, at least, found it so, for when he tried to despise what, by the books (or, for example, according to Celia), was despicable in Powel, he found himself suspecting his self, that often burdensome companion, of base envy.

Because, too, he had begun to wonder whether he could, in fact, 'let go', as Celia put it, Edward did not answer her, but looked sulky and said, 'What do you want to do now?'

'It's tiresome, but I think I ought to go home, I ought to relieve Mother when I can.'

'Any change in your father's condition?'

'None. He's just apt to die at any moment.'

And not, Edward thought but did not say, to apologize like Charles II for being an unconscionable time about it. At least four times in the past few months he had fought off death until it seemed to Edward, who had sat with him a good deal for Celia's sake and her mother's, that his strength was drawn from a kind of hatred, a grim refusal to let the world go on living without him. The courage of his battle with the cancer inside him did not, at all events, have the face of courage which was familiar to Edward as to every able-bodied citizen of a belligerent city during those years. It may have been his misfortune that his 'faces', his appreciable conduct, gave an ill look to motives which may, after all, have been virtuous. That very evening Edward heard, in this connection, a singular tale from Mrs. Woodreeve.

For when he and Celia reached Overbury Park Road and Edward had parked the car on the waste in which number fourteen now stood, supported by the standing remnant of ruined neighbours, Celia relieved her mother in the sick-room. Edward sat with Mrs. Woodreeve while she ate a supper of bread and margarine and tea, and a small dish of stewed apples. She did not answer his question

about Mr. Woodreeve's condition, only smiled at him vaguely. Edward was uneasy with her because, ever since she had walked into that room and found Celia in his bed, she obviously felt guilty for having given him cause for shame. They sat in silence until she said, 'That's a very pretty ring you have bought for Celia.'

Edward had made a joke of giving the ring to Celia, she of accepting it, saying that if it wasn't war-time she would expect, also, a white wedding at St. Margaret's, with a guard of honour composed of journalists and radio mechanics forming an arch with rolled newspapers and soldering irons. Yet Edward had satisfied something in himself by giving her a ring, a sapphire set in gold. To her mother's praise, he said, 'Mr. Powel helped me. He has a friend in the jewellery business.'

Powel had such friends in every kind of business: not even his aspirin came from a shop.

'A funny thing happened while Celia was out with you,' Mrs. Woodreeve said. 'I heard a noise, like crying it was. He seemed asleep and I came out to look. Well, there was a white cat outside the back door, mewing to come in. It used to belong to the people at seventeen who were all killed in the raid. Goodness knows where the poor thing had been all this time. There she sat, looking like starving Russia; and that dirty! "Why, moggy," I said, "what are you doing there?" Silly the way we talk to animals, isn't it? As if they could answer. But it seems so . . . so rude, not to. In she walks, as if she owned the place.'

Mrs. Woodreeve looked at Edward and then away again. Her hands were still in her lap, the arthritic finger turned right in. 'I couldn't very well turn it away,' she said. 'I gave it some of that dried egg we couldn't eat, that tasted mouldy. Pussy didn't mind, there was nothing wrong with her appetite, I'll say that for her.'

'I know you're fond of cats,' Edward said.

'I never told you about One and Two,' she said.

'Only that you had to get rid of them.'

'They started behaving queer,' she said.

'Queer?'

'It was Two, mainly. Shut the door of the room she was in, and she'd get frantic. She'd run to the window, and then to the door, asking to get out the way they do, crouching and wincing; if she'd been a person, you'd've said a nervous breakdown. Very unpleasant to see and nothing you could do but leave all the doors open which wasn't possible. Very upsetting.'

'It must've been.'

'It was him.'

'Him? Mr. Woodreeve?'

'He couldn't abide them. I'd give them a little bit of something off my plate sometimes, or a bit of cheese, cats are fond of cheese. He couldn't say anything, what with subscribing to the R.S.P.C.A. for years and getting up petitions and one thing and another . . . but it fidgeted him something shocking. He's done a lot of good in his time, only . . . only . . .'

Edward suddenly realized that she was crying, sitting upright and quiescent in her chair with the tears running down her face, and for the life of him he could not be sure whether it was for the man who lay upstairs slowly dying, or for the cats he had done something to, although what he had done he still did not know. She went on, in the low and monotonous voice of extreme fatigue which she had been using all the time, 'He'd lose his temper with them, that's what it was. Take when the washing-up was being done, they'd come round for bits left on the plates. One night when I was feeling poorly and he did the dishes for me, I went out to get a glass of water and see if I could help and when I opened the kitchen door he was chasing poor Two round the kitchen and flapping at her with the dish-cloth, and his face . . . well, I don't want to think of it. And the door closed, so she couldn't escape, that's where it was . . .'

The spectacle she thus evoked was risible to Edward. He was saved from any danger of betraying her by the smile which was forcing itself on to his face, when Celia came in and he could turn towards the door. Celia said, 'Mummy, dear, you'd better come up I think,' and her face said the rest. They left Edward and he sat waiting and when, after an hour, Celia came down, she said, 'This is miserable for you. You'd better go. Come in tomorrow.'

'I'm on duty.'

'Bloody fire watching?'

'No, it's ambulance night.'

'Friday, then.'

* * *

Mr. Woodreeve did not die that night. Edward telephoned to inquire in the morning. He had to go to Haslemere and on the way back to call at an assembly factory and start a row about an excessive percentage of faulty CR tubes in a recent consignment. He was back in London in time to go on duty at seven. He belonged to the same A.R.P. ambulance depot as Adam Olby, who was there that night.

Edward had not seen him for some time; their duty nights had not coincided. Olby told him that he had recently been re-transferred to Kinesound, their old firm. He and Edward had their sleeping-corner on the floor of the underground garage. There had been no raids for months and they had grown used to long nights of sleeping and waking in their clothes, wrapped in smelly army blankets spread on stretchers. It was not until they were both settled for their four hours off watch, and Edward had lit a nightcap cigarette, that Olby said, 'Look, Tillotson, it's nothing to do with me and I don't know why I should bother, but there's something I think you ought to know. As I told you, I was on loan to Kinesound all last week, on that loud-hailer job. They're slack and have been doing a bit of post-war planning. I happened to see a couple of drawings—you never patented your FB, did you?'

'No. Could I?'

'I don't know. In theory I don't believe in patents; the work of men's minds ought to belong to mankind. But since it's not like that, since what we've got is a sort of free-for-all, I don't see why you should be swindled by those sharks. Your FB arrangement appears twice in the circuits I saw . . . it's for post-war television, by the way . . . once in the amplifier, and once in the video circuit. It seems to me you ought to know.'

Edward said he was grateful. 'As a socialist I'd rather you had the money than that bloody little Yid conjurer,' Olby said. Edward flushed in the darkness, and said, 'It isn't that I haven't thought of it. But I can't take the idea seriously—of a peactime, I mean, when it will matter. This . . . this lying wrapped in dirty blankets on the floor of a cellar stinking of petrol . . . it seems to me the way people live now. About the right level, if you know what I mean.'

Olby laughed; he said, 'It's because you don't understand what's going on. If you'd do as I asked you and come to one of our meetings . . .'

'Well I know, but I never seem to have time.'

'The Red Army is on the move. There'll be a second front now all right. Our masters could stomach a Nazi Germany in control of Europe, but never a Communist Russia . . .'

Edward did not listen to Olby's interpretation; he was incapable of attending to that kind of thing, it simply ran off the surface of his mind. Olby's words began to register when he said, '. . . and there will be peace within eighteen months. Then, for a decade, the catch-as-catch-can scramble will go on. And you might as well have

your cut. No point in winning a lottery if you never collect the prize-mohey.'

Edward asked Powell's advice about patenting his FB. Powell suggested letting the firm's patent agent handle the business, and he gave Edward a letter to the man. Edward went to see the agent that evening and then dismissed the matter from his mind; or rather, had it put out of his mind when he went to Celia's on the Friday evening and met the doctor letting himself out of the house. Edward asked after his patient and the doctor replied that there was nothing to be done, that it was a matter of hours. And, standing with his hand on the door of his car, 'He's a brave man, Mr. Tillotson. For eighteen months he's known this was coming. Wouldn't have anything said to his wife. Didn't see why she should have the misery of it, too. Faced it alone. I've just been telling her how well I think he's behaved.'

His words translated themselves into a rebuke and a reproach to Edward. But he was almost immediately offered a gloss on the doctor's words of praise: standing in the hall to take his coat off he heard Mrs. Woodreeve weeping, through the half-open back-room door; and Celia saying, 'Don't Mummy! God knows you've done all you can.' Then a short silence. Then Mrs. Woodreeve's voice, so far above its normal pitch as to be on the way to shrillness, and charged with an atrocious resentment, saying, 'Why couldn't he have told me? Him knowing all that time and saying nothing to me. Wasn't I even to be allowed to be that much use? There was that time I bought him a tie and he told me he could buy his own ties and I'd do better to save my money. I tell you he did it to leave me thinking I never helped him, and for always feeling I never was up to helping him . . .'

The white cat looked at Edward through the open kitchen door. It sat on the table. Already such disorders were invading the house of that most orderly man. Doubtless, Edward thought, the cat was poaching the dying man's game. Celia's voice said, 'You mustn't think that, Mummy.' Deliberately, Edward rattled an umbrella in the hall-stand. Celia came into the hall, her face grey, looking twice her age, not with grief, but with a kind of frustration, a kind of anger, perhaps at the overwhelming strength of the nearly dead. Edward said, 'I saw the quack leaving,' and she said, 'Mother's in a state. And I ought to go up to him.'

'Stay with her,' Edward said. 'I'll go up. Is he unconscious?'

'Not all the time. Intermittently.'

There was a disagreeable smell in the sick-room. Mr. Woodreeve lay perfectly still on his back. He had lost a lot of his hair and the loss had given him a philosopher's brow. The skin was yellow, loose over the bones of his face, and as shiny as if it had been varnished. He looked noble and dead. Edward drew near to the bed, unable to reconcile what he saw with the man implied by his wife's bitter complaint of a husband who had never had the generosity to accept anything, even sympathy. It seemed to Edward that Mr. Woodreeve was attending to something, manifest to Edward only in the faint, persistent sickly stench which came from him. Death was a commonplace of every day then: like many able-bodied Londoners Edward had handled the dead as if they were so many indecent incumbrances. But this kind of dying appalled him, as he stood straining to hear what, obviously, Mr. Woodreeve was hearing, until he suddenly realized that it was the ticking of the old man's watch made resonant by the table top on which it lay: it was a gold half-hunter presented to him many years ago by some social or political body he had served. Mr. Woodreeve made a whimpering noise, and his hand, until then supine on the bedclothes, began to crawl, like a small, white animal, towards the edge of the bed with an extraordinary air of its own purpose. Edward moved round the bed and put the watch into his hand; the dying man paid no attention to him. His eyes became suddenly congested, and the veins below the glistening bone of the temple, swelled. Edward saw that he was making some kind of effort but he had no idea what its purpose was until, with a brief access of strength, Mr. Woodreeve flung the watch from him, his eyes dark with some kind of power. The watch crashed into the hearth, just short of the bright hot fire which had been consuming most of the household's coal ration for many weeks. Mr. Woodreeve made that whimpering noise again, and Edward picked up the watch and looked uncertainly from it to him. 'It's all right,' he said, 'it's still going.' Mr. Woodreeve heard and understood, for a look of angry despair came into his face, a message so clear that Edward instantly put the watch to his ear and said, 'I'm wrong. I'm afraid it's broken. It's stopped.' At that moment Celia came in and Edward took his eyes off her father and when, seeing a warning in Celia's expression, he again looked at the bed, Mr. Woodreeve's head had sunk into the pillow and the face was smoother, nobler than before.

Hours later Celia said, 'Why did you have his watch in your hand?' The doctor had been again by then and written the certi-

ificate and Mrs. Woodreeve was in bed, drugged. Celia and Edward sat before the fire in the back room, transferred by him, on a shovel, from her father's room. He told her what had happened, but she pronounced no judgement.

4

ALTHOUGH it seemed quite natural to Edward that his own official assignments, which were becoming more important as he showed an increasing shrewdness in negotiation, should make it difficult to fix an early date for their wedding, it was less easy to admit that Celia's work, too, must come before their private concerns. At first he had been sufficiently surprised at his own success in persuading people to follow courses chosen for them by his own judgement, to be modest; but what he had first attributed, under Commander Pardoner's guidance and Powel's sardonic and experienced eye, to the fact that ninety-five per cent of the human race is only too glad to have its mind made up for it by someone else, Edward was soon attributing to his own ability and force of character; so that when Celia could not make her arrangements suit his own, he was angry. They had several rows; and then, quite suddenly, Edward's opinion of himself seemed to collapse, he told Celia that he had been behaving badly and that the arrangements must be made to suit her. It was as if he had suddenly remembered that she might only be marrying him for her mother's sake. Celia was too generous to accept her victory on those terms—which she suspected of being the reason for Edward's sudden weakness—and said, 'There's no need to go to the other extreme. It should be quite possible to suit both of us.'

She could not possibly know the real reason for Edward's retreat to humility. One evening, as he was leaving his lodgings with an overnight bag to catch a train to Portsmouth, where he was to spend two days doing sea-trials of a piece of gunnery control apparatus, Mrs. Campion ran after him with a letter which she had forgotten to give him that morning. Edward put it in his pocket and did not read it until he was in the train. It was the most unpleasant letter he had ever had in his life, and he was not even able to show the feelings it aroused in him for the railway carriage was crowded with naval officers returning from leave to their ships.

It was a solicitor's letter and as he began to read it he was trying to think of what bill he had failed to pay; as he read on, he was seized not at first with the rage of innocence accused, but by fear. He knew perfectly well that he was not the father of Eileen's child, which was what the letter accused him of. But he was at once as guilty as if he had been; and certainly it was by no restraint of his that such a condition had been avoided. When, re-reading the letter, Edward saw that his appropriate reaction must be righteous indignation at an outrageous attempt to blackmail him, this sense of the real guilt which underlay his superficial innocence was a grave handicap. *Shysters* was the word his self uttered, in an indignation Edward recognized as hollow, to describe the no doubt perfectly respectable firm of Ashersham solicitors who wrote 'instructed by our client Mr. Ernest Figgis'. Edward read the letter twice and decided that he needed help, if only in the form of a lawyer's assurance that this was no better than a disgraceful attempt on his pocket.

When he reached Portsmouth he was entertained to dinner in the wardroom of a cruiser, but lodged ashore in the R.N. barracks. He slept badly and rose early. He could not dismiss that solicitor's letter from his mind. He was not due aboard the cruiser again until noon. It occurred to him that it would be a good idea to seek legal advice at once, in this place where he was quite unknown. As he left the dining-room and walked out into the hall of the officers' mess, he was wondering how to set about finding a lawyer. It was the petty officer doing duty as porter, and who turned out to be a townsman, who gave him an address: 'You can't do better, sir. I ought to know, I was a bailiff between the end of my thirteen, and this lot.'

The partner in the firm recommended by this man, who received Edward, had a soft, dry voice and a way of dropping his terminal G's with archaic elegance. He inspired confidence. Edward began by giving him the letter to read and then told him the whole story, not even omitting the fact that the tale told to the coroner at the inquest on Arthur Figgis had been a little modified away from the truth.

For his occasional work at sea Edward wore the uniform of a R.N.V.R. officer and, his responsibilities having increased, the sleeve-rings of a lieutenant-commander. As soon as he had finished his tale of woe, the lawyer shut his eyes and blew through his nose, like a horse before drinking, and said, 'So that intimacy, as we say in our mealy-mouthed courts, did not take place, Commander Tillotson? *Anglicisé*, you did not have intercourse with this girl?'

'I did not. I don't pretend it was for want of trying, but the fact is we were interrupted, as I've explained.'

'Quite so. The law in these cases is concerned with facts, not with intentions.'

He re-read the letter. Impatient, Edward said, 'How do I stand?'

'You will have noticed, Commander, that this letter does not threaten action . . . ' The lawyer's calling Edward 'commander' was bothering him, introducing a fresh element of dottiness into the whole incident; it was as if he were obstinately refusing to address Edward's own self, and would talk to someone else who was not quite there. 'No; action is not threatened. It is, rather, an appeal to your better feelings. It implies that now that you have been apprised of the fact that you have a son, you will wish to contribute to his support and education, possibly even to recognize him. I take it that, in view of what you have told me, that is not the case?'

'Of course not. It's obviously a try-on.'

'That I cannot, of course, say. I can say that the reason no action is threatened is that under the law of bastardy application for an affiliation order cannot be made by or on behalf of the mother in the case more than one year after the birth, unless the alleged father has ceased to reside in England during that lapse of time; or unless he has acknowledged paternity *de facto* by voluntarily paying maintenance. Have you done so? The fees for the mother's lying-in would, in certain conditions, be regarded in that light.'

'I tell you I had never even heard of any child until I opened this letter.'

'Quite so. The child is now nearly three years old. Where is the passage . . . ah, yes . . . *Miss Figgis resolutely refused to reveal the father's name until, during a recent serious illness, she confessed the whole truth to her uncle, givin' him your name.* Why should she have done so, Commander Tillotson?'

'She refused because she didn't know. If I know her, there was a wide choice. Ernest Figgis may have at last succeeded in bullying her into naming someone, perhaps by threatening to turn her out of his house. She named me because if she named anybody actually in the neighbourhood, they would certainly have denied it and made a row on the spot. Or . . . she may think that her knowledge of what really happened that day when her father died, or what she is prepared to say happened, will frighten me into paying up.'

'She, and her uncle, are known to you as unscrupulous?'

'No. He is simply hard and ill-natured. She isn't unscrupulous.'

She isn't anything definite. She would act like . . . like an animal, without forethought, doing the easiest thing for the moment.'

'An image of our world, eh, Commander? Have you seen her since the . . . incident?'

'No.'

'Written, perhaps?'

'No.'

'She may have brooded; resented your neglect.'

'I suppose so. The fact is, I never thought of her as . . . as a *person* . . . I mean a complete human being. Come to think of it, that's a rotten thing to have to say. But there it is. I know absolutely nothing about her, really. The thing is, can they take legal action against me?'

That was not, really, the *thing* at all. What Edward sought was absolution. But this man, who was a lawyer, not a priest, said, 'No. That is, I doubt it. I certainly would not act for a client in such a case. I should not, I think, even have consented to write this letter. If the mother were destitute and the local authority took charge of the child, then they could act against you. I see no danger of that here, unless the uncle, this Mr. Figgis, throws the girl out, as he could do, of course. I find it difficult to see why this letter was written, except on the supposition . . . ' He paused and Edward said, 'Well?'

'It is not a question of law, and it is only guess-work, Commander Tillotson, but it is possible that the writer of this letter is a friend of Mr. Figgis's, a close friend, acting in his capacity as such. It would perhaps have occurred to them that while not in a position to take this case into any court, the circumstance of their claim reaching you in the form of a lawyer's letter rather than a letter from Mr. Figgis, would be more . . . impressive. No solicitor would have agreed, even as a close friend, to threaten action: it would have been too like blackmail. But I suppose that a solicitor's letter is always a little intimidatin'.'

'I still do not know how I stand.'

'In law, you stand in no danger. It is not for me to say what your own feelings will prompt you to do, should these people seek you out and confront you with the mother and child. Nor whether they are likely to do so. Their legal adviser will have apprised them of the position in law.'

It might not be for the lawyer, but it was for Edward, to say what his feelings would prompt him to do. The problem of deciding this was in his mind throughout two rough days at sea. Despite the fact that he was not, could not possibly have been, the father of Eileen's

child, he could not rid himself of a sense of guilty responsibility which left him no peace of mind. For hours he dwelt anxiously on what Celia would say. He concluded that he was not afraid to tell her the truth if he could have done so: but in some extraordinary way he did not know what the truth was. He perceived, with painful clarity, that if he should recite the facts to her without a word of a lie, his manner would inevitably suggest consciousness of lying. He was utterly without faith in his ability to avoid a terribly destructive want of candour, while being, in fact, perfectly candid. He came, in fact, to a very singular conclusion: that he could with a better countenance and less damage to their mutual confidence tell Celia that he had a son by Eileen, that is lie to her in a sense damaging (in the ordinary convention) to himself, than tell her the less damaging truth, that the Figgises, or at least Eileen Figgis, were trying to blackmail him.

He was completely convinced by this the first moment it crossed his mind; and utterly baffled by it until he came to a second peculiar conclusion, a conclusion which was the beginning of self-knowledge: that the false confession he contemplated would match the sense of generalized guilt which debilitated him and that it would therefore make his confession sound true. His manner in lying to Celia would be honest and convincing because if he was innocent in fact, he was guilty in intention.

Back in London, Edward neglected his work for a day to make the final arrangements for his wedding; and to telephone Eileen Figgis's solicitor, to whom he had already written a brief and formal note of repudiation. The name of the partner who spoke to Edward sounded, over the telephone, like Ollowbun, and he had a kind of cockney accent. (It was David Mendoza who, much later, explained the difference between the grand, unwitting, Edwardian *chic* of that kind of cockney, and just ordinary London cockney.) He said, 'Ah, Mr. Tillotson, I rather thought we might 'ear from you.'

'I don't see why. My letter . . .'

'Told us a bit more than you thought, Mr. Tillotson. Any 'ope of seeing you?'

'If I come I would want to see Eileen Figgis and this child of hers.'

'Very proper sentiment if I m'y s'y so.'

'You certainly may not say so, Mr. Ollowbun. There's nothing "proper" about it. But I knew half the chaps she went with. There's just a chance I might spot a likeness.'

The lawyer ignored that and said, 'There's a good train from Charing Cross to Ashersham at nine-five, if you're at liberty.'

'Very well. I'll come to your offices,' Edward said; it would mean another day before reporting back.

At Ashersham station he remembered his way to Valerian Street, one side of whose short length was what remained of the old city wall, its eponymous flower growing in pink and white profusion from every gap between the stones. The other side consisted of five early Victorian houses with crescent drives and laurel clumps. One was occupied by Messrs. Halloband, Parkes, Tett, Tett and Cavelin. Mr. Halloband had a presence made up of a thick walrus moustache, a gold chain over a satin waistcoat of sombre brocade, an extraordinary jacket of black vicuna not long enough to be a frock-coat and not short enough to be anything else. He had almost no forehead, but that meant nothing, except that the man who made his toupee was a bungler. He looked rather like a photograph of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He said, 'Gottem in Cavelin's room. Cavelin won't mind, poor devil. Killed milkin' 'is 'ouse-cow at 'is plyce near Smarden, on D-Day. One of them doodle-bugs. Shockin' w'y to mike war, if you ask me. Well, sit down, sir, sit down. You've a proposal to mike, I dares'y.'

'None whatever. I've already told you that I deny paternity. I'm here to put a final and definitive stop to this game of Ernest Figgis's. You've had the child blood-grouped, of course?'

'Blood-grouped? God bless me soul, no!'

'Well, if necessary, I shall insist on that. It happens that my own group is a rare one.'

'How about seeing the mother and child?'

'Very well.'

Edward's heart began to thump disagreeably. He tried to control the muscles of his face.

Eileen had not thickened, which was contrary to his expectation. She would not look at him. Nor did she look at the quiet, nervous little boy whom Halloband, with surprising kindness, held by the hand; in fact she seemed to be trying to pretend that he wasn't there. He said, 'Hallo, Eileen.' She said 'Hallo' to the window, and, with sudden passion, 'If it wasn't fer Uncle Ernie, I'd rather've . . .'

'Just let me do the talkin', Miss Figgis,' Halloband said.

Edward was watching the boy. He had gathered that his name was Arthur. He said, 'Come here, won't you, Arthur?' The child looked at his mother and she, still looking at things rather than people,

said, 'Do as ye're told, can't you?' The little boy came and stood in front of Edward who had the helpless feeling of a monoglot confronted with an alien. The child bore no likeness to him, that was one thing; nor, for that matter, to his mother. Edward suddenly remembered her, Arthur's mother, getting up from his lap in terror, and Figgis, that rectangular and ill-articulated primitive, lurching at him whitely in the hot cottage kitchen. Mr. Halloband's office was suddenly full of the smell of warm cake. Edward said to the lawyer, 'I want to talk to you alone.'

For the first time Eileen looked at him. She said, 'No, Ted, this is business.'

'Then send the boy out,' Edward said. In front of him, he could not play his part; he was ashamed. Mr. Halloband rang the bell on his desk. When his clerk came in, he said, 'Arthur, go with the gentleman, like a good boy.' Edward was walking uneasily about the room. As soon as the child had been taken away he stopped in front of Eileen and said, 'You know as well as I do, I never fathered that boy. Look at me, Eileen.'

She would not look at him; but he looked at her. She was prettier than she had been and she had lost none of the animal quality which had been so disturbing. She had gained, or rather acquired, perhaps from the need to defend herself against Ernest Figgis, a measure of slyness, almost of vulgar sophistication. For a moment she glanced up at him, then looked away, saying, 'You 'eard what Mr. 'Allowband said. He does the talking, not me.' Edward was looking down at her, hardly heard her answer, was genuinely curious and a little disturbed. He said, 'Did you nurse the boy yourself?' It was impossible to picture her doing so; impossible and distasteful, just as it had annoyed him to see her making a cake.

'I couldn't fancy it,' she said, for a moment speaking as naturally as she had done in the past. Edward turned to the lawyer and, in his need to feel much taller, much bigger, with his recent successes and what he saw as his 'prospects' in mind, and the knowledge that although he told Celia the truth he would feel that he was lying, would, in a way, *be* lying, he said, 'I'm no more Arthur's father than you are, and she knows it. I'll pay her three pounds a week till the child's off her hands. In return I want an affidavit, or whatever you call it, in which she admits the truth, that Arthur isn't mine.'

He could hear himself saying this as he might have heard someone else; it was like reading dialogue in a book. Halloband said, 'I could not allow my client to sign any such . . .'

'I'll sign, all right,' Eileen said, before he could finish. She stood up and said, 'You're all right, Ted. You always were.'

That was the assurance Edward had been after. Halloband said, 'It will be absolutely *contrairy* to me advice, Miss Figgis. The substance of yer claim on . . .'

'It has no substance,' Edward said.

The lawyer looked at both of them, shrugged, said that he would give his clerk instructions, and walked out of the room. Edward stood by the window and looked out at the parish church. Someone, possibly his Aunt Sarah, had told him that it was very good of its kind. He knew nothing about that. It looked all right. Presently, from behind his left shoulder, Eileen said, 'Give us a kiss, Ted.'

He turned round and did so, and she stepped back from him, saying, 'It was Uncle Ernie, not me. I . . .'

'It was you all right,' he said, 'but I forgive you. There isn't much I wouldn't do myself to get out of Ernie Figgis's hands.'

It was immensely enjoyable, worth the three pounds a week he was not even sure of being able to pay her and had offered because nothing is easier than making grand promises. Halloband came back into the room and said, 'It will take us about two hours to prepare the two documents, your respective undertakin's.' To Eileen Edward said, 'You'd better take Arthur to the pictures.'

'Come too,' she said.

'No, thanks. I shall get a taxi and go and see my Aunt Sarah.'

'So you should, too,' Eileen said, with the righteousness which comes naturally to all women, albeit taken in sin, 'your uncle's a great worry to her.'

'You mean he's ill? I haven't heard for some time.'

'It's 'is religion,' Eileen said. 'It'll be the death of your aunty I shouldn't wonder.'

Edward recalled that some unsatisfactory condition of Walter Tillotson's conscience, some debility of his justification, had been mentioned in Aunt Sarah's last letter. Perhaps he had grown worse: strong religious convictions are often like strong drink abused: both imply an intense preoccupation with self and the problem of escaping from self; both lead to a neglect of business which may have grave consequences. And Edward saw, as he got out of the taxi and listened to the driver's superfluous explanation of what he would do with himself during his hour-long wait, that his uncle's property had started on the decline which afflicts the worldly goods of saints and alcoholics. Not that there was anything, yet, which could be described

as dilapidation. A visitor who did not know Walter Tillotson might not even have noticed the small and numerous heaps of rubbish not yet carried to the compost bins, or the three hens strayed beyond their proper enclosure; the greyness of unpainted glazing bars on the greenhouse roofs might have been attributed to the war, but not the few broken panes and the many which were green with algae. The war, Edward knew, had nothing to do with any of this: no war would have had any power against his uncle for as long as he was sure of justification.

Sarah Tillotson came to the door and the marks of the same decline were in her face. Edward and his Aunt Sarah had always been very quick in understanding each other, and when she saw him turn his head to glance up at the warning of the Lord's imminent coming, she said without bitterness, 'Oh, he finds time to paint that, of course.'

Edward followed her into the house, explaining where he had been and what, in theory, he had been doing. Of the war all she said, referring to the leaders, was, 'Well, I suppose they know what they're about. But us being so many, what with them Americans and Russians, and the others only the Germans, we've taken our time, if you ask me. There's times I wonder whether even Mr. Churchill . . . and yet they say he's a clever man. Well, there it is, on and on and on, and nothing to show for it. And as for the Committee . . .' she meant the War Agricultural Committee, ' . . . it's nothing but nosy-parking.'

'Uncle having trouble with them?'

She nodded: the Committee had powers to take over land which was not being used effectively. Edward followed her into the kitchen because Aunt Sarah insisted on putting the kettle on for tea. Edward put his arm round her shoulders and said, 'Is it altogether their fault, Aunty?'

'No, Teddy, it's not, and that's a fact.' She took the handkerchief out of his breast pocket and blew her nose violently.

'I thought I noticed things,' he said.

'You couldn't miss them, love, knowing him. He sits about, brooding. "You might as well set a cluck hen on a clutch of chalk eggs," I says, "for all the good squatting over your immortal soul's going to do you. It's like I've always said," I says, "you let Mr. Clintock . . ." You haven't met him, Teddy, he's new to the parish. "You let Mr. Clintock look after your soul. That's no work for amateurs. Happen that'll leave you free," I says, "to attend to

Denne's bill. If it wasn't for the war and you being such an old customer," I says, "they'd've county courted you for that matter of seventy pounds a twelve-month since." Of course, I shouldn't've said it, I know that, Teddy, with him not feeling himself. But he's as provoking as a schoolboy in love.'

While Edward drank his tea he wrote Denne's a cheque for the seventy pounds and gave it to her. It would leave him with under a hundred pounds in the bank, but money was easier to get than what he was trying to buy with this cheque and Eileen's allowance. Aunt Sarah said, 'I'll take it, though 'd rather it hadn't been called for . . .'

'Money doesn't matter,' Edward said, lied, interrupting her; and because she was a woman who never in her life mistook that kind of claptrap for truth, he added, awkwardly, 'I mean it shouldn't. Not between us.' She shook her head at that. 'Anyone can see you're a Londoner born,' she said. It was a reproach; it meant he had no proper principles.

'The car driver will only wait for an hour,' Edward said. She nodded, and went out on to the porch where the honeysuckle plant had fallen from its supports and was sprawling, and rang the old hand-bell. And presently, still responsive at least to that earthly call, Walter Tillotson came stumping across the littered yard and into the house and said, absently, that he was glad to see Edward. He made no answer to an inquiry concerning his health and, speaking for him, loud and clear, as if he had suddenly become hard of hearing, his wife said, 'He's all right in himself.' But that, Edward thought, was just what he wasn't. He looked at him, at his shrunken face, his earth-coloured hands and clothes, and his slightly mad eyes. Aunt Sarah left the room to leave the two men alone together, but Edward had no idea what to say to the old man. In the end he had to make do with, 'You've got to think of Aunt Sarah.'

'Have I?' Walter Tillotson said, and, 'I'm not sure of that.'

The car driver sounded his horn to remind Edward of the time. 'But I'm sure,' he said.

'I'm not sure of anything any more,' his uncle said. It was said with sudden, violent feeling, there was a cry of pain in it, of a protest he would afterwards think of as blasphemous. It was like a cruel light cast upon his condition. How could you clear a greenhouse of dead tomato plants and prepare it for another planting if you were sure of nothing any more? The truth Edward's uncle revealed in that cry of pain was outrageous. Edward was stung to anger and

said, 'It's always seemed to me that your preoccupation with your own soul was selfish.'

'Of course it's selfish,' Walter Tillotson said, testily, as if Edward had expressed the opinion that water is wet.

* * *

Mr. Halloband was waiting. Eileen had been back to his office, signed the paper and gone. Edward read quickly through both documents and signed his own without comment. Mr. Halloband looked at him curiously as he dropped the papers into a drawer, and said, 'It ain't professional, but I wonder why ye're doin' this.'

'If you've got a banker's order,' Edward said, 'I'll fill it in and sign it. It'll save trouble.' While he was doing that, he answered the other's question with, 'I don't know. I've just left a man who's sure of only one thing, that there's no merit in works.'

'Ah. Yer Uncle Tillotson. I've heard him preach.'

'Preach?'

'In Wesley's Pulpit.'

'Good God! Did anyone go to hear him?'

'A few.'

Wesley's Pulpit was a rough, covered platform built of heavy timber on the top of Figgis's Hill. The site was supposed to be common land, was actually on the Sheffendene estate, but was never claimed by the lords of that manor. The pulpit was locally supposed to have been erected by Wesley's followers so that the great evangelist could preach to them. Mr. Halloband said, 'Yer uncle gave that up, too. There was no merit in that, either.'

Edward waited while he locked the office and they went down to the street together. When they parted, the lawyer said, 'Yer uncle may be right. But I like your way better.'

Because he liked the man, that made Edward feel fraudulent.

One hundred and fifty pounds a year was going to be a heavy tax on Edward's income. He asked Powel about the patent business, for they had heard no news of it since the idea had been put to him, and an appointment was made for Groton, the patent agent, to come to the office and see both of them—Powel explained that he might have a proposal to make. 'It might suit you,' Powel said, 'to make some kind of satisfactory settlement before your wedding. Wednesday, isn't it—of next week, I mean?'

'Yes.'

'How much honeymoon are we giving you?'

Powel knew perfectly well what had been arranged, but Edward

only said, 'Pardoner said I could take a week if it's all right with you.'

'Where are you going?'

'Lloyd, down at the factory, has fixed us up at Beaumaris.'

'Very nice, Ed. I just bought me one of those fishermen's cottages on the coast not ten miles away. The bass fishing is swell. It's not furnished yet, or I'd lend it to you.'

'Thanks anyway,' Edward said.

Groton was one of those men whose professional manner is such a smoothly finished artifice that it is not possible to say what kind of human being had furnished the raw material for this product of craft. He began at once by saying that they were dealing with a very smart man: 'As I expected, Mr. Lipschitz has taken out a provisional patent,' he said, with a kind of professional admiration for the smart man. Edward immediately became very excited and angry, at which Groton seemed surprised.

'It's not unusual,' he said. 'It is always worth a firm's while to try it on. The inventor may not trouble if he is not himself a professional. Somebody may as well have the patent rights.'

'And I just have to let it go?'

'Dear me, no. We shall start an action if necessary. In that case Aldington would be the man to brief. We call him the inventor's friend. He makes his fifty thousand a year out of patent cases. However, I don't think it may come to that, these Kinesound people may give way.'

'Don't you believe it,' Edward said. 'Lipschitz is psychic. He'll have had a green light on this from Rameses the Second or the prophet Elijah.'

Mr. Groton tittered politely and said, 'I have no doubt of our succeeding at law.'

'But, good God! I can't afford a case of that kind,' Edward said, 'I haven't any real money.' At that Powel, who had apparently been reading a document on his desk, said, 'There's a point I want to make about that, Ed.' Edward looked at him and he went on, 'I'm prepared to back you in this. For a consideration, as they say.'

'What consideration?'

'Why not let our legal people work that one out? Some sort of contract between us and you whereby we fight for your rights in return for exclusive exploitation of your patent for a given term, you being paid on a royalty basis. You might grant us an exclusive ten-year licence. From our point of view, it's a gamble: we don't

know how much difference your FB will make until we've built a prototype; and we don't know how important television is going to be after the war. From your point of view, it looks like that or nothing.'

Edward looked at Groton who said, 'I'm afraid that is so, Mr. Tillotson, if you are unable to contemplate a suit at law.' Edward nodded and turned to Powel and said, 'Well, all right then. I'll leave it in your hands.'

5

ALTHOUGH the arrangements, such as they were, for their wedding, were made in all seriousness and Edward would not have questioned the proposition that he was going to be married in a week's time, he suffered a curious uneasiness about it. He wanted it to happen, it was going to happen, he knew this to be so; but he did not feel it to be so. Of course, all private acts were given a contingent quality by the long-continued public act of war, but Edward's feeling that his future and Celia's was precarious was not due to the uncertainties implied by the war. It was almost as if he had been present to overhear a conversation between Celia and her mother which took place a couple of weeks before the wedding day.

Mrs. Woodreeve had been ill at ease not only with Edward but with Celia since she had found her daughter in bed with Edward: she had difficulty in looking at Celia and in talking to her naturally. There was no reproach in this uneasiness, but rather a kind of apologetic self-deprecation, as if she felt a need to be forgiven for having blundered into the privacy of her daughter's life and, having done so, for being unable not to be unhappy about what she had seen. She was like a cripple who, by his attitude, constantly apologizes for his incapacity.

When she had told Edward that she 'would not want to interfere' she had gone as far as she could in refraining from putting pressure on her daughter's lover: for, after what she had seen, she did want them to be married. She would have had difficulty in saying why, for she would have admitted that she did not believe in God and could, therefore, have no feeling that sexual intercourse ought only to be done under priestly licence. It may be that all her life she had been afraid of the powers that be, the *Them* of common speech,

and knew that it is extremely dangerous to do anything at all without official sanction.

Mrs. Woodreeve had another cause for uneasiness: she had admired but never quite understood Celia's bold contempt for all criteria but her own consciousness of knowing what was right and what wrong; and she had always been a little confused by Celia's often frivolous and even outrageous way of expressing herself on the subject of conventional conduct, established morality and accepted ways of feeling. She was by no means certain that Celia wanted to marry Edward; she knew her daughter loved her; she was afraid and worried lest her own attitude which, irrational as it was, she could not change, might be forcing Celia to marry. She wanted Celia and Edward married but it would be terrible to her if she had to consider that marriage as a sacrifice to her feelings, which the young people did not share.

One evening when Celia came home from work tired she was irritated by her mother's rather hang-dog looks and said, 'Do cheer up, Mummy. Anyone would think next week's occasion was a funeral, not a wedding.' Celia could say this because she knew that her mother was no longer grieving over her husband's death or, if she was, kept her grief for private indulgence. As her mother said nothing, Celia rose and crossed in front of the fire and knelt by her mother's chair and took her hands and said, 'You aren't happy about this wedding, are you, darling?' 'Of course I am,' Mrs. Woodreeve said, but she had noticed that Celia had said 'this' and not 'my' wedding. 'Well, I must say you don't look it, Mummy.'

Mrs. Woodreeve made a great effort and said, 'Celia, you do know I wouldn't want you to do anything, I mean very important, against your own feelings, just because I——'

Celia, interrupting her, said, 'What are you talking about, dearest?'

'If you don't know, Celia, there's no more to be said.'

'Good,' Celia said, and kissed her. But just before going up to bed for an early night, Celia said, 'Marriage isn't irrevocable nowadays.'

She had not meant to say this aloud but it had been so much in her thoughts that it had said itself. Her trouble was similar to that of the politician who is almost convinced by his own propaganda which he knows perfectly well is not based on truth. From her sixteenth year she had realized that her beauty was a worldly asset in exactly the same spirit as an ambitious man knows that his brains are a worldly asset. Her beauty, carefully used, could bring her

success, that is to say large possessions, by enabling her to marry a man of consequence and wealth. These ideas came to her despite her upbringing and her own strong feeling that they were, for some reason, base. It was impossible for her not to entertain such ideas, they were forced on her by the whole spirit of the age, by the conduct, as described in the Press, of the people most in the news, by the absence of any standard of success but wealth. But she had resisted them not simply because she accepted the convention that they were wrong, but because, although she could not dismiss them, they disgusted her, as the sensual dreams and images which the state of his glands force upon a man chaste not only by training but by nature, disgust him. Despite his disgust, such a man cannot dismiss those images and dreams; despite her disgust, Celia could not help knowing that by marrying a man of no consequence she would be disposing of an asset disadvantageously.

Celia was in love with Edward Tillotson and for most of the time she wanted to marry him. But this wish seemed to her, at other times, silly. She had said, time and again, that an ordinary marriage for love was a bad bargain for a woman capable of making her own living; that in the world as men, not women, had made it, a woman who did not use her beauty, if she happened to have any, to marry money and power, was obviously a fool. And if any man present protested, she would point to the covers of such magazines as were lying about, to the careers of several large-breasted cinema actresses, to the histories of half a dozen queens, kings' mistresses, noblemen's or millionaires' wives, and say, '*Tu l'as voulu*, Georges Dandin.' But although she could not get away from the logic and intelligence of these opinions, which jumped to the eye, she could not really accept them, either. They were repulsive, and her mind held them despite her heart. In her feminism, Celia refused to realize that what is sauce for the gander is not always sauce for the goose, although as an admirer of Stendhal she should have noticed his disastrous failure to bring Lamiel, his female version of Julien Sorel, to life.

Four days before the wedding her editor sent for her and nodding to the chair across his desk, handed her a cablegram which announced that Graham Cohen, assistant to McFadden who for four years had been the paper's principal correspondent in America, had been killed in a motor-car accident. Celia said that she had never known young Cohen but was naturally very sorry. The editor said, 'The New York and Washington offices are very important, of course, and McFadden has made them even more so. He needs someone at once

and I haven't much opinion of any of the younger men over there. I'd have sent Costello, but he's with the American fleet in the Pacific.'

Celia knew what was coming and was so exultant that she had great difficulty in keeping a broad smile from forcing its way on to her face. The editor looked at her, frowning, and said, 'Let's see, when is this wedding of yours?' as if it were a matter of her summer holiday. In the same spirit Celia, without hesitation, replied, 'If you are going to offer me the job, don't bother about that.' And, honestly speaking aloud what were her own thoughts of a postponement and of how it would affect Edward, and her mother, she added, 'A few months' delay won't make any difference.' 'Remarkable loyalty to the paper,' the editor said, with dry distaste: he was a man over fifty and although Celia's attitude to her wedding suited him, he really felt that she should have put marriage before anything else. Celia, who saw what was in his mind, and who was incapable of pretending that loyalty to the paper was really her motive, said, 'It's a chance nobody would want to miss.'

'You'd have to leave tomorrow.'

'I can do that.'

'Very well. I'm not sure that I'm doing the right thing, but I hope so. It's a great chance for you, McFadden is the best foreign correspondent living. Don't throw it away.'

While he was talking, the editor had pressed his bell and when his private secretary came in, he told her to 'Get Miss Woodreeve on to the *Carmatic* with all her papers in order.'

There was very little time to do all that was necessary: Celia had to go to the passport office, the United States Embassy, the bank and the Shipping Office, at each of which there were delays while clerks and executive officers wrote on those innumerable pieces of paper and wielded the rubber stamps which sustain the illusion that they have the world in hand, that chaos and old night are being kept at bay, and that they are doing useful work. Celia, however, enjoyed this nonsense; had she had nothing to do but, as in the almost forgotten brief age of liberty, to walk aboard a ship and go to America, the thing would have been much less exciting. She telephoned her mother to pack for her and avoided all but the sketchiest explanation by saying that she had no time to talk but would tell her about it that night. 'I shall be late,' she added, and sat for a minute before the telephone fighting down the irrational sense of guilt, of being about to do something cruel, which possessed her spirit at the idea of telling Edward.

The PBX girl at Llewellyn and Powel told her that Mr. Tillotson would be out all day. She asked for Mr. Powel who said, 'Miss Woodreeve? How nice! Ed's down at Haslemere. Something we can fix for you?'

'It's important, Mr. Powel. I want to be absolutely certain of meeting him tonight. Can I get him at Haslemere?'

'You might not. He's gone to see a man called Pardoner. They may go out to a production plant near Guildford. You'd best leave it to us to reach him for you. Where do you want him to meet you?'

'I don't know—well, *Flaubert's*, perhaps, say at seven-thirty.'

'O.K. Leave it to us.'

Celia had been waiting ten minutes at *Flaubert's* when Edward came in. Flaubert had stood over her for part of the time, saying that although he hardly had anything he could really recommend, she no doubt did better to come to him, for there was nothing even fit to eat elsewhere in London. And, when she hesitated over ordering a drink, '*Comme apéritif, j'ai toujours quelques bouteilles de chamberi.*'

She was drinking chamberi when Edward came in, looking strained and rather dirty and saying at once, as he fell into a chair, 'What is it? What's gone wrong?'

Celia had intended to be as honest with him as she had been with her editor and herself. But she found herself presenting the matter in quite a different way and although her own dishonesty was distasteful to her, she went on in the same spirit, saying that Graham Cohen's death had put the paper, the editor, 'and your old acquaintance McFadden' in a very great difficulty, that there was nobody but herself to send, that she did not see how she could very well refuse——

Edward interrupted her to say that, besides, it was a wonderful chance for her. He tried to say it warmly and happily, as if he were delighted and did not mind the postponement of their wedding. And in a way this was so, nor was it the postponement of the wedding which so offended his self that he had the greatest difficulty in stilling its clamorous protests. It was Celia's success, Celia's wonderful luck, Celia's new importance, the triumph of *her* self, which were so hard for his self to bear. He drank a chamberi and went to wash and they had dinner. Edward insisted upon buying one of *Flaubert's* remaining bottles of champagne to drink to Celia's success. It was very dear and champagne was a wine neither of them liked, but he had to do something active to put down the resentment

which his self kept forcing on him like a beggar displaying a repulsive mutilation. Celia kept saying, 'Of course, it will only be for a month or two. Only a few weeks, really.' Both of them knew that she could not really be wishing this, for only a failure could bring her home so soon. If she did well the real date of their next meeting and presumably of their wedding could not be until she was given home leave, which might not be for a year.

Because of his increasing responsibilities and the fact that they often kept him late out of London or in the laboratory, Edward had been released from civil defence duties. He could have gone home with her, but he told her that he had urgent work to do in the laboratory. He was afraid of and upset by the feelings of anger and resentment which Celia's good fortune had forced on him. He tried to pretend that they were nothing but disappointment about the wedding postponement and grief at parting from her. But his increasing knowledge of the way his self behaved was too strong for him. And just as, once, he had been horrified to see his own face caricatured by his father's as they appeared side by side in a looking-glass; so now he was horrified by the image of him which his self insisted on bringing to his notice.

They parted awkwardly and uneasily that night, each conscious of doing evil. But in the early morning, at Waterloo Station, on the platform beside the boat-train, there was a much better moment when they kissed and clasped each other, with nothing in their hearts but the distress of parting and nothing in their minds but the wish that there was nothing in the world to tempt them from loving each other.

* * *

When Celia came home from America the Allied armies were across the Rhine. She had been away for seven months so that although her return was not in triumph, nor was it in disgrace. But it seemed that she felt it needed apologizing for, that she had not been a great success and this was not due solely to the fact that as soon as her colleague Costello was released from his assignment with the United States Pacific Fleet and landed in San Francisco, he was posted to McFadden's office and Celia ordered home. There had, in fact, been a very unpleasant moment for her a week before she left New York. McFadden, just back from Mexico City, had sent for her, told her to sit down, explained that Costello was on his way to replace her and, without pausing, had added, 'I think I'm bound to tell you that my report on you will have reservations.'

Celia had flushed and said, resentfully, 'I'm sorry.'

'You're a pretty fair journalist, Celia, and you're a worker. But you've too good an opinion of yourself.'

'I haven't the slightest idea what you mean.'

'You'll probably do well enough at home. But, man, when you work among foreigners you won't get far if you make them feel that you dislike them!'

Instead of denying that she had done this or expressing contrition, Celia had said angrily that 'despise' was the word. McFadden had looked at his finger-nails as if this embarrassed him. Then he had said, 'Aye, that's it. I'm nearer sixty than fifty and I never managed to despise a whole people. You'll sail on Tuesday.'

Celia had walked, red-faced, out of his office.

She was not a woman who ever found it easy to apologize. Edward had long since realized that, in the language he had picked up from his Uncle Walter, she did not know what it was to be unjustified, and knew herself right by grace. Edward met her at Southampton and on the way to London she made an entertaining and rather wild story of her relationships with Americans. 'Talk about fighting for one's honour,' she concluded, 'and, my dear, the food! No wonder they're sub-human, poor dears!'

Edward was embarrassed by her insistence on justifying her failure by making savage fun of the people she had been working among, and he would have been willing to drop the subject and talk about the future, about their wedding, which was to take place in a week's time. But Celia kept reverting to the Americans. Once she said, 'Did you know that when they adopted the European standard of health for acceptance into their army, they found themselves rejecting all but twenty per cent of their conscripts?'

'Oh, really?'

'There's something terribly wrong with that country. Perhaps it's the soil or the climate.'

'They're doing some pretty good work in the sciences,' Edward said, dryly. To which Celia replied, 'With imported Europeans, mostly.'

They had both arranged for a week's leave following the wedding and resumed the plan to spend it at Beaumaris. Edward's Aunt Sarah came up from Goudhurst to be his witness; Celia's was her mother. His aunt and he arrived at the Maiden Lane registry office a few minutes before it opened. Mrs. Tillotson was still explaining why Edward's uncle had decided not to come to the wedding—

something to do with his 'justification' being again in doubt; she made it sound like any other elderly wife talking of her husband's 'old trouble'—when Mrs. Woodreeve arrived alone, saying, even before Edward had a chance to introduce her to his Aunt Sarah, that Celia would be along in a few minutes, she had called at her office on the way. Edward was annoyed and depressed by this casual behaviour. He introduced the two women and they went into the registrar's office, and Celia came in a minute or two later, looking very beautiful in a blue linen suit bought in New York. She was smiling with the excitement not of her wedding but of her news, which she gave without preamble—"The Germans have surrendered to Monty."

Edward felt resentful: he might have no very solemn notions of marriage but it was not agreeable to have an event of such overwhelming public importance competing with him on his wedding day; it made it difficult to concentrate. And Celia at once made it worse by saying, 'Darling, it's complete hell, but Beaumaris is off. I've got to stand by to go to Germany with Mordaunt. My first feature job. All colour and no facts, you know the kind of crap.' Edward glanced nervously at his aunt, but evidently the word meant nothing to her. He said, 'I see,' and Celia, 'Oh, it's not as bad as *that*. If I go, I'll be back inside a week. And they'll only send me if Marion's 'flu isn't better by tomorrow . . .'

She went on explaining while Edward fell deeper into sulkiness at being thus relegated to a secondary place. Only a lucky fit of sneezing saved him from snarling that he could not see himself hanging about waiting while she did her sob-sistering. His aunt said, 'Now he's caught a cold,' rather as if Celia's news was responsible for this catastrophe. Mrs. Woodreeve said, 'I think the man wants us now.'

The registrar, having overheard Celia's announcement, was not very interested in marrying them. When they approached the table he said, 'There was a power-cut at Palmers Green this morning, so I missed the wireless news. I couldn't help overhearing what you said . . . ?' Celia said that the news had not been released, and repeated it, with additional details, and when the registrar shook his head and referred gloomily to the prevalence of misleading rumours, Mrs. Woodreeve said, quite huffily, that her daughter was on a newspaper and ought to know, and named the paper. 'I always read the *Express* myself,' the registrar said, as if making up his mind to wait for Lord Beaverbrook's confirmation of the news. Celia, her

professional pride stung, said, 'Ah, the no-war-this-year-or-next paper.'

'We all make mistakes,' the registrar said, and at once began to marry them, reading the preamble with conscientious clarity. (Later, Edward's aunt was to remember this and say that 'it wasn't much of an omen to introduce a marriage ceremony'.)

Married, they walked out into bright and windy sunshine, Aunt Sarah saying, 'May I be the first to congratulate you, Mrs. Tillotson?' and Celia, 'Oh, dear, yes, thank you, that's my name, it sounds so odd.'

Peace of mind was not to be restored to Edward that day. They walked—Powel had objected to his excessive use of petrol coupons—to a photographer's in the Strand (Mrs. Woodreeve had insisted on this), Celia and Edward leading, once letting their little fingers touch and entwine for a second as if each were anxious to reassure the other. Their witnesses followed them, Edward's aunt with her bustling, hen-like movements, Mrs. Woodreeve with the short, tight steps which were an expression of her reserve. Edward could hear Aunt Sarah talking steadily, and from time to time Mrs. Woodreeve saying, 'There now,' or 'Fancy' or 'Who'd have thought it?' Their progress was impeded by the obligation to turn round from time to time and say that it was not far now and to smile. The midday evening papers were on the streets and people were standing to read the front pages. After they had been photographed they managed to find a taxi. The driver did not want to go to Overbury Park, saying that he was short of petrol. There was a brief triumph of Edward's mood over Celia's when the taxi-driver failed to respond to her 'Oh, come on George, we've just been married!', but responded at once, albeit with a scowl, to the pound note Edward put into his hand. Inside the cab Celia said, 'They've all been corrupted by dollars. The shape of things to come.'

Mrs. Woodreeve's rations had been sacrificed extravagantly to the wedding feast; Aunt Sarah had added a dozen eggs and a half-pound of butter. Powel had sent two bottles of Mumm. Half-way through the meal and when, despite Mrs. Woodreeve's efforts, they were all silent, the telephone rang and Celia said it was for Edward. It was Powel, saying, 'Married yet?'

'Yes.'

'My congratulations. You're a lucky man. But the luck's a bit postponed, old boy. Look, I hate to do this to you, but you'll have to get back here right away. S.S.O.'s yelling for you. Admiralty want to borrow you, wedding or no wedding.'

'That's a bit much,' Edward said.

'I daresay, but I can't help that. They're short of know-how in some kind of flap over the other side. *C'est la guerre.*' His accent was even more American when he spoke French.

Edward's complaint had been merely formal. In reality, this summons had set him up again. His self sang a little song of triumph. He loved Celia; her presence transformed, transmuted, the commonplace world into a place of brilliance and warmth and pleasant sounds. Yet it was with difficulty that he suppressed his high spirits to announce 'Admiralty want me at once on the other side.' 'We don't have any luck, sweetheart,' he said, resuming his place at the table.

'What have you to do?'

Not knowing, he invented, the implication of top-secrecy enabling him to be both vague and brief. Celia said, 'Why the hell does it have to be you?'

'You cannot be more surprised than I am,' he said, but showing that he was disconcerted. Celia saw that and said quickly, 'I didn't mean *that*, you clot! Darling, I was addressing the Almighty, not you!'

Sharply, for her, Edward's aunt said, 'I'm not surprised Edward didn't realize it.'

'Dear Mrs. . . . dear Aunt Sarah,' Celia said, filling Aunt Sarah's glass, 'you'll have to bear with me. I have a loose tongue.'

'As long as your heart's in the right place, which I'm sure it is,' Aunt Sarah said, and Mrs. Woodreeve, sourly, 'I can answer for that, Mrs. Tillotson, though I say it as shouldn't.'

They finished the wine and left Aunt Sarah who was staying the night with Celia's mother, and went out and walked to the bus stop together. There was a painful constraint on both of them. In the bus, to break it, Edward said, 'I don't know how to deal with an anticlimax like this.'

'Perhaps we should've waited,' Celia said.

'I didn't want to,' he said, and, 'You can wait a lifetime for politicians and soldiers to stop their tantrums nowadays.'

'Nor did I want to,' Celia said, hastily, catching up in the game of reassuring each other. She went on, 'And you're right. If we let them get away with it, all we'll be is constituents. Constituents is what most people are now.'

'Politician fodder.'

'Yes.'

POWEL said, 'I don't know much so don't keep asking questions. You're to put on your uniform and go to a place called Deuxbacs. It's in Normandy. There's a mine-laying flotilla there, fitted with our L.12 detector. It's playing up. There's a top-brass Frog named d'Argenlieu going to see it, and it's got to be behaving right time he gets there. Report to a guy named Jones—Commander Jones. Haslemere have sent you warrants. You can draw on us for dough. O.K.?'

Edward had turned to go when Powel said, 'I almost forgot. That agreement over the TFB patent. It's ready for signature, at Groton's office. Want to sign it before you go?'

'When I get back,' Edward said.

Deuxbacs is a dirty little fishing port, no more than a village, near the mouth of the Vire. Its climate is rain, or at best a kind of Scotch mist. Its Senior Naval Officer was an elderly R.N.R. commander with a beard in which his fingers were for ever poking and scratching angrily, as if seeking something they, but not he, had lost. He said, surlily, that all he was there for was to hold squatter's rights against the U.S. Navy, and to brood over a pile of stores for the flotilla which was mine-sweeping the bay. When Edward inquired about his mission, 'Jones?' he said, 'he's out sweeping the bay. Be ashore in a day or two. I've no billets. You can sling a hammock here, or you can take a room at Audouart's. I'll pass your expenses, but don't overdo it.'

'Audouart's?'

'The café. He has four rooms to let. Jones keeps one for sleeping with his tart. Don't touch Audouart's calvados, it's not six months old and no better than skimmins.'

Edward did not know what skimmins were, but confined his drinking to Audouart's hard cider. The café proprietor was a drunken lout with a nose mutilated by a syphilitic lesion of which he was by no means ashamed. Teaching Edward to play billiards in his back room, during two days of soft, drenching, exasperating rain, the smug rain of Normandy, Audouart told him about the Tunisian brothel where he had contracted the disease, and, proudly, about the physiological singularity which had made it impossible to treat him with sulfa drugs. The *toubib* had poured several litres of mercury

into his veins. And his hideous disfigurement had its uses: persons ignorant of the ravages of syphilis sometimes took him for a *gueule cassée* and gave up the specially reserved corner seats in railway carriages to him . . . His fighting had been done in the *bled*, against the Riff led by a sort of super-sheikh called Abdel Krim or something of the kind. That was war, that was. What did *vous autres*, safe behind your machines, know about it? Look at that species of a commander who passed his time hunting for fleas in his beard! He did not say it to offend Edward, far from that, but was that war? Ah, poor France!

To Jones, when that officer came ashore and who treated him with open contempt, Audouart was servile—'*Oui, mon capitaine, de suite, mon capitaine, parfaitement, mon capitaine . . .*' accompanied by a military salute and a smile, intended to be whimsical, but which was made grotesque by the absence of half his nose. Behind his back, he referred to Jones as '*ce petit saligaud*' or simply, but with loathing, as '*l'Anglais*'. Jones was a small, white-faced, almost albino man whom Edward at once guessed to be rich, for his manner had that hard assurance which is a bought commodity and comes dear. With lucid intelligence he explained what the L.12 detectors were doing wrong and why his flotilla radar and torpedo officers had been unable to deal with the trouble. Edward said, 'You'd better take me to sea for a couple of days, while I fix the things for you.'

'All right.'

Edward spent two sunny, busy, pleasant days mine-sweeping with Commander Jones. One of them was VE Day, but the war seemed very remote; it was like being out with the fishing-fleet. Then they came in again. Edward's orders were to wait until the inspection was over. He and Jones had an afternoon's sailing in the estuary, in a steady downpour of rain, Jones being an experienced yachtsman. There was a very high wind—Jones called it a stiff breeze—and twice Edward was badly frightened. On the second occasion, with the boat skidding on its side, Edward yelled at Jones, 'Isn't this dangerous?'

'What do you think? Can you swim?'

'About fifty yards.'

It seemed to amuse him; the nearest land was quarter of a mile away. That night, over dinner, Jones said, 'The best way to enjoy life is to risk it. Ever done any gliding?'

'No.'

'You should try it. The best game of all.'

'Do you really believe that—about risking life?'

'Why the hell should I say so if I didn't? Have you tried Audouart's calvados?'

The power of his curt assurance, the mockery of his pale eyes, his hard courage, all overcoming the handicap of his poor appearance, were impressive. To his question Edward said, 'Another big risk? I was warned against it.'

'Oh, not the rotgut he sells his customers. He's got some seventy years old. Keeps it in his bedroom.'

Jones ordered some, and insisted on keeping the bottle. He always spoke to Audouart in a loud and hectoring voice and in English. Audouart, who claimed to know no English, seemed to understand him.

'The point is,' Jones went on, 'men, males, are meant to risk their lives all the time. If they don't they go to pieces. It's why miners are the only proletarians with what the Spanish call *honor*. And a few deep-sea fishermen, perhaps.'

'Meant by what or who?' Edward said. Like fiery whey the calvados slid down his throat leaving an aftertaste of apples and a faint bitterness.

'By nature,' Jones said. 'One male can fecundate twenty or more females, probably many more, a hundred if you allow for eighteen months' intervals between pregnancies.'

'Rather tiring,' Edward said.

'Call it fifty. You still don't need one man per female head of population. Males are expendable, and when nature evolves an expendable creature, she gives him the necessary instincts, an inclination to run into danger, or at least a blindness to it. The male spider and the male mantis don't resist being eaten by the female after coupling. The reason all modern literature is no bloody good is that writers don't know this or choose to ignore it. Except Antoine de St. Exupéry. Read him?'

Edward had not. But he argued, half drunkenly, that you couldn't consider man as just another animal and compare him with spiders and mantids. Man had made himself into something different, something more.

'Or something less.' Jones's small, white determined face, not emphasized by the usual hairy accents because the eyebrows were almost white and the lock across his forehead was colourless, spoke to Edward out of a tobacco-cloud, like an oracle:

'Because you can't make anything but the way the material wants

you to go, if it's live material. You can't make anything against the grain. It's why mankind is wretched: we don't like what we're meant to be, and can't make ourselves into what we weren't meant to be. All our reverence for our own lives, our safety-first rubbish, takes away the justification for the male. Did you ever read Pascal, Blaise Pascal?

And when Edward shook his head, 'You haven't done anything and you haven't read anything. You'd better get weaving, as they say in the R.A.F. Pull your fingers out, Tillotson. This fellow Pascal was a self-pitying coward who pictured us as chained prisoners watching each in his turn led out to execution. And, despite his mathematical genius, he was frightened by his own image into accepting God. It won't *do*, man! Life is worth living just because it's finite and pointless, because death is ever-present . . .' He dreamed for a moment and then added, violently, 'Christ! How bored the immortal gods on Olympus must have been!'

Edward said, vaguely, 'I get fed up with myself,' and, giggling drunkenly, 'always carrying me around! Like a dirty big overweight baby.'

'Of course,' Jones said, 'because you take care of yourself, because you won't spend yourself. Thrift! People are misers about life. Like money, it's for risking, not hoarding. You've nobody to account to but yourself.'

Edward wondered vaguely what his Uncle Walter would have said. He went to bed reeling drunk. The next day the French admiral and his staff arrived, accompanied by Commander Pardoner who said to Edward, 'I'm taking you back to Paris with me. Their Marine Militaire people want some help translating the L.12 and K.72 Admiralty Confidential Handbooks. What do you think of Jones?'

'He's mad,' Edward said.

'No, Tillotson, just very, very sane.'

Two days later Edward was in Paris, working with an officer named Thurgau. The city was already recovering from the shock of the '*tireurs des toits*' who had opened fire on De Gaulle's procession down the Champs-Élysées; and from the euphoria of the 'bloodless revolution' which was to have ushered in the Gallic millennium. Men with complacent mouths came up from Africa to take over the Ministries from the inspired lunatics who had silently fought the Occupant for four years. Recrimination succeeded self-liberation.

Dry as a kex and almost as thin, Thurgau, with his slow, Alsatian

manner was only very moderately pleased to see Edward. He was a Polytechnicien; he was not a pleasant man to work with: he resented having to ask for explanations and received them not only without thanks but with a kind of scepticism, as if he thought it impossible that Edward could know anything. But they only worked together until lunch-time, after which Edward returned to the Hotel Béranger, where he was billeted, and had the rest of the day to himself. He saw nothing of Commander Pardoner, who had gone to Brussels on a mission.

Edward discovered Paris by the simple expedient of walking about. The city was by no means fully returned to life, yet to him, after the squalor of London, it seemed gay and beautiful and extraordinarily clean. He loitered and strolled, gaping at places—the Madeleine, the Sacré Coeur. A less obvious place captivated him, an embankment between two of the bridges where the shop-keepers set out stalls of plants and birds in cages; the Quai de la Mégisserie. He followed the river from there and crossed a bridge, a second bridge, and found himself on an island in the Seine, and under the shadow of Notre-Dame. He went into the cathedral. There was a requiem mass being sung, and for five minutes he stood still and listened and let his eyes explore the nave. Although it impressed him, he was not really interested in architecture, nor in God; and the organist was a fumbler. He came out and decided to walk home by the left bank. There was a restaurant down beside the river, with very pretty window-boxes, and he made up his mind to come back that night and dine there.

He walked to the restaurant again that evening, sulky and depressed because Celia had not written. It was not crowded, but nor was it deserted. He was the only customer dining alone, and he began to feel at first sad, and then impatient, as if someone were wasting his time. At the table next to Edward's against the wall, an American woman of seventy with the face of a centenarian parrot made up like a whore was talking percentages, of what he did not hear, to a young man with a wild-rose complexion and large boil on his forehead. The only other table within earshot was occupied by two senior American army officers and two Frenchwomen who said nothing but ate copiously. One of the officers was finding a score of original ways of calling De Lattre de Tassigny a show-off; the other kept saying, 'I guess that's so, Colonel,' taking off his spectacles, polishing them, replacing them, and then drinking a glass of water. It occurred to Edward that he must have had something like a

gallon of water swilling about in his poor stomach. He thought of it as sea-water sloshing about in sour bilges, and the image so disturbed him that he finished his bottle of wine and ordered another in an access of hydrophobia rather than oenophilia: it made him first thoughtfully and later brutally drunk. When he stood up to leave, he was not quite steady, but he reached the door without wavering by walking very fast. There was a taxi standing waiting outside the restaurant and it seemed to him quite natural to step into it. And he was not particularly surprised, on the other hand he was vastly and rather noisily amused, when, without waiting for any direction, the taxi-driver drove off at once.

Later, of course, he realized that the taxi had not only been summoned by someone else, but that the driver had been given his orders by the commissionaire; and that, the commissionaire having gone to tell the man, whoever he was, that his taxi was waiting, Edward had arrived and by stepping into it, given the driver to think that he was the fare.

After they had driven for some time along the left bank of the river, and turned left and crossed the boulevard St. Germain, Edward was completely lost. They seemed to go on for a long time, until, drunk though he was, it did occur to Edward that he was behaving oddly in not stopping the driver. He pulled himself forward by the back of the front seat and said, '*Ou allons-nous?*'

The driver thought that his fare was simply becoming impatient at the distance, and said, '*B'en, à l'Arcamore . . .*' adding that it was a long way. He went on grumbling half aloud about how long it was, and him with hardly any petrol. He was so ill-natured that Edward did not have the courage to ask him the nature of their destination: he could not face mortifying and complicated explanations. Besides, in a way he knew. Or perhaps it was only what he hoped—but it seemed to him that something in the driver's manner meant that their destination was a house of ill-fame.

It was a big, dark house in a straight, quiet street, well beyond the Sèvres-Babylone quarter. The driver said, '*Ça y est*' and demanded a monstrous fare, which Edward paid. In a much less automatic way than that in which he had entered the taxi, now in deliberate search of excitement, of a girl, of . . . of something, he went up the steps to the door, found a bell-pull, and tugged it. No sound, but the door opened almost at once and a woman with the face of a gipsy huckster visible in the rose-red light from a large hanging lamp, said, 'Come in, then; and be welcome.'

There was a staircase and there were several doors opening off the hall: the one they went through had an inscription very neatly done in gold paint above the top panels: *sedes arcanarum libidinum*. At the time it meant nothing except that Edward identified the middle word as being more or less the name which the driver had applied to the house. The bawd he followed into the room so marked had, perhaps in her youth, had an erudite lover. Or perhaps the inscription had been due to some lecherous old scholar, a regular customer, excusing his uneasy lust by means of this classical whimsicality.

The room was very large and lofty, done in red velvet and white and gold paint, and crowded with furniture, mostly chairs and day-beds and small tables, among which its two occupants, both young women in evening dress, looked forlorn. The whole effect, possibly because of the subdued lighting, was sad. The two girls rose and came towards him, and at the same moment, as if by a managed effect, the lights went out. Although this was quite normal at the time and was due to shortage of fuel or faulty gear at the power station, Edward, still drunk, was at once in the grip of fear which was near-panic; and as if the advancing women intended to do him a mischief instead of to give him pleasure, he backed away in the darkness more precipitately than was wise, stumbled against a piece of furniture, and sat down heavily—fortunately the stumbling block was a large chair. Meanwhile, out in the hall, a rather metallic female voice cursed the '*centrale*' loudly and obscenely, bade someone good night and then called, '*Lou-lou, tu es là?*'

Loulou was clearly the bawd, for her voice, calling her whereabouts, answered from near the door. One of the girls, present as a strong scent of musk in the darkness before him, suddenly subsided into Edward's lap and started stroking his head and fondling his ears. At the same time Madame Loulou applied a match to the wicks of first one, then a second and third candles, which were evidently in readiness. The light distracted his attention from the interest he was beginning to take in the silent but assiduous girl in his lap. Then the door opened and—it was like a dream, even a bit of a nightmare—Doris came in pulling on a pair of gloves and screwing up one eye against the smoke of a cigarette inelegantly stuck to her lower lip, and saying, '*Eh, bien, chérie, je me sauve; si tu as quelqu'un pour moi, tu me . . .*' She did not complete her instructions because Edward, so shocked by surprise that he did literally forget that he was not free to move, jumped to his feet with a 'Good God

Almighty, Doris!', spilling nine stone of astounded and at last articulate girl on to the floor in a manner which was quite good knock-about farce.

As if the engineers at the distant power station were co-operating, the lights came on so that Doris and Edward could stare at each other. The girl who had shown so brisk a devotion to business got up, telling him that he was badly brought up. Doris said something to the Madame, who shrugged and walked out of the room; and snapped '*Ta gueule!*' at her colleague. She must have had some ascendancy in the place, for the girl obediently held her tongue. To Edward, dealing with first things first as always, clearing the decks as Commander Pardoner would have put it, Doris said, 'Got any money?'

'Yes, some,' he said.

'Give her five hundred and apologize. Her name's Rachel.'

She said this exactly as if the family dog had growled at him and she were telling him not to be afraid, but to pat him and give him a lump of sugar. Edward had nothing smaller than thousands, and he could hardly ask for change, so he gave Rachel a thousand francs and said, 'Please forgive me, Rachel. It was the surprise of seeing an old friend.'

The girl took the money and said curiously, 'So you know Dottie?'

'Yes. I've known her for years.'

'Ah, I understand,' she said. 'It must have been a shock to find her in a bad place like this.'

Edward could not think of a deprecating politeness less ambiguous than 'Not at all' in French, or for that matter in English. The remark was unanswerable. In any case, Doris said, 'Come on, Ted, I'll take you home,' as if their reunion had taken place hours ago, their surprise was over, their explanations all given. He followed her out into the street. A man was paying off a taxi and he gave Edward a sharp stare; it was probably the man whose taxi he had taken at the restaurant. They took his vacated cab and Doris gave the driver an address.

'It's quite a way,' she said, as they settled in the back seat. Edward felt that it was necessary to go back a little and start again, properly, at their surprising meeting, with some appropriate comment. So he said, 'Well, this is very strange. Nice but strange.' That expressed neither more nor less than he felt: he had no disgust or shock at meeting Doris in a brothel; only surprise at meeting her at all. Doris, rather grumpily, said, 'I don't see anything strange in it.'

Since I was stuck in Paris when the Germans came, I was likely to end up in a place like that. And if you came to Paris at all, so were you.'

It was curious how speaking French had improved her English, but Edward was too hurt by her remark to dwell on that. He said, 'Why? Why do you say that?'

'Because it's so. Because you always liked it, you never had the courage to get it, and the obvious thing was to buy it.'

He said bitterly to that, 'So we're birds of a feather.' And then, absurdly attributing her brutal affront to her own humiliation he said, 'Look, I'm terribly sorry. If I can help you get away, and I can, I . . .' She interrupted with a burst of genuine laughter, of real amusement. 'You're a scream, Ted! You always were. I don't *work* at the Arcamore. I own a piece of it and I use it sometimes to meet people.'

'Why didn't you come home when the French turned it in?'

'I thought it'd be a good idea to be on the winning side.'

'I see,' he said, coldly enough to make his feeling clear. Again she gave that clear, unambiguous laugh. She said, 'You didn't expect me to be a patriot, did you? I guessed wrong about the finish, but that's all I'm sorry for. Patriotism is for them as can afford it, duck . . .'

'Plenty of people of your . . . your class, were patriotic.'

'I daresay. More fools them. Besides, they couldn't bloody well help themselves, could they, old dear? I'm not saying I thought of it at the time, but if there was no patriots there wouldn't be any war, would there? My trade teaches you a thing or two, Ted, and the first is that men are all the same shape whatever label they stick to themselves and whatever language they happen to jabber. There's one thing about being what I am, it makes you broadminded.'

They had stopped at a traffic signal, and the interior of the taxi was well lit by street and shop lights. Doris took off the elaborate beret she was wearing and put her hands to her hair. Edward saw then that her head was closely capped with tiny soft curls, the hair not an inch long. It gave him a chance to break away from the distasteful line of her talk by admiring her hair-do; indeed, it looked charming. She said, 'You can thank the bloody partisans for it, since you like it.'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'They shaved my head for me at their bloody silly liberation.'

'You'd been . . . going with Germans?'

'I'd been living with a German. One; singular, duck. For three years. He had a glass eye—lost the real one in Greece—but he was all right and I was fond of him and I'm not ashamed of it.'

'In that case, I suppose it's O.K.'

'They caught him because he stayed behind too long, saying good-bye. Soppy, ain't it? Like the talkies. I watched them shoot him from the first landing, as he ran downstairs.'

'I'm sorry, Doris, very sorry, really. If you loved him, it must have been . . .'

'Love? Who said anything about love? You was always on about love. He was all right. A man like any other. Soppier than some; not so soppy as others I could name. Let's not talk about him. The dead aren't interesting. Here we are, anyway.'

Edward did not know much about Paris, but enough to be surprised at Doris's address: it was in a smart little street somewhere off the rue Royale. There seemed to be several rooms. He received a general impression of size, softness, pinkness; the chair he sat in was overstuffed; the table Doris put his whisky on was inlaid and of the kind he had only seen in expensive shop windows. None of it was in a taste which, whatever had happened, could possibly be hers. There was a log fire burning in a polished steel and bronze grate. Doris got herself a whisky and sat on the rug by the fire. Edward said, 'How d'you get whisky?' and she replied, 'By knowing Americans.' He began trying to talk about the past, but she was not interested; it seemed to Edward that nobody but her German *Oberleutnant* had ever made any impression on her, and he was not sure that even he had done so. Doris gave him a strong impression of being out on her own, an aggressive, almost feral, creature. She began to ask him questions about himself and said that judging by his rank he had done all right. Edward did not tell her that his uniform was nothing but a licit disguise to enable him to be in the war zone without difficulties. He shrugged, as if too modest to discuss his small achievements. He realized that for Doris there was only now, this minute. By then they had had more of her whisky and he was at ease, not as drunk as he had been but drunk enough to be off his guard, so that when Doris said it was surely about time he was married and that it would come cheaper than going to places like the Arcamore, although this way of putting it offended deeply against the idea of Celia in his heart—for hypocrisy, at least in him, was not artificial, it was fundamental—he overlooked that and forgot the place where he had met Doris and the impression of him that

must have made on her, and told the facts even, incredibly, seeking sympathy for being parted from Celia within an hour of their wedding. To this, bringing him sharply to a sense of his own behaviour, she said, 'Ah, that accounts for me finding you in a knocking-shop.'

That was like being hit in the face; he felt a wave of cold pass through him, chilling even his hands, and for a moment he thought he might be sick on her valuable carpet. It passed and left him, as he thought, sober. He got up, saying, 'Time for me to go.' Doris looked at him and said, 'I never did quite twig you, Ted. You're a half-and-halfer. What do I care about you going from your wedding to that place? You don't think I was being narky, do you? I like people the way people are. You act like you knew what things are really like; but you go on talking as if you didn't; or didn't want to.'

He was going to answer her, although he did not know quite what to say, when the door opened and a slender, still pretty, but ravaged-looking girl came in. The shape of her face was vaguely familiar. She did not look at him. She held on to the door and Edward saw that she was not quite steady on her feet. When she spoke, in French, her voice had the attractive huskiness of the whisky drunk, marred by slurred articulation. She said that someone she called the big vegetable had telephoned to say that he could not come that night. Doris said, 'O, Christ, Tina, you're drunk again,' and to Edward, 'That means you can stay. I was going to chuck you out at eleven. I don't remember if you ever met Tina.'

'I'm afraid I don't remember the name,' Edward said, looking at her friend, and then his memory worked and he said, 'Of course. Princess . . . Var . . .'

'Varyatinski,' the drunk girl said, and bowed slightly with perfect solemnity. Edward stood up and bowed back and she walked out giggling, closing the door behind her.

'You've been together all the time?' he asked Doris.

'Yes. Her drinking's an expense, but she does what I tell her, and most of the housework.'

He said, 'Look, I don't think I'll stay.' He had been slowly working up some indignation at the atrocious implications of her last remark before they were interrupted. For his own sake he had to find an answer, but all he could say was, 'As for what you said, I'm not going to explain or try to explain what led me to that place, but I'm damned if I'm down to anything as ugly as you seem to believe in.'

'That's more talk,' she said, 'I don't go much on talk. It's what people do that counts. F'rinstance . . .'

She came to him, put her arms round his neck, one thigh between his legs, and her tongue in his mouth. He made no effort to justify his expressed opinion by any serious resistance. Doris pushed him over to a chair and shoved him into it and sat in his lap. It became clear to his clamouring body and even to his rapidly clouded mind that her skill in her trade was of the highest order. Presently she got suddenly to her feet and looked down at him smiling, then laughing, no doubt at his expression. And she said, nodding towards the door, 'Out of there and through the one opposite. Count five hundred. And don't cheat.'

He did not cheat: he had counted the full five hundred before he went to the door, crossed a passage and went through the opposite door into a bedroom with a big low bed, and a wash-basin with gold-plated taps, a bidet, chairs, a velvet-draped dressing-table, and a folding screen. Doris was not there, and he hesitated. The light was low, but it was quite good enough for him to see that the naked girl who came out from behind the screen and into his arms was Tina Varyatinski, giggling; her breath reeked of spirits, but so did his own no doubt.

And it was as Doris had implied, the substitution made no difference.

Afterwards, Edward's one hope was that Doris would not appear to take a producer's bow before he could get out; and perhaps say something about one grey cat being much like another in the dark. The princess, still apt to giggle, got his clothes for him and saw him into the hall. With his hand on the door-knob he thought he was safe; but he had given Doris too much credit even then. He heard her voice behind him saying, 'Good night, Ted.' He wanted to walk straight out, but he turned round and said, 'Good night, Doris. Oh, by the way, what do I owe you? I mean, I don't know the tariff.' It was feeble; and as ineffectual as it deserved to be, for she laughed with real amusement again and said, 'I expect I've got more in the bank than you, Ted. I can afford to be generous. It was on the house.'

7

THE following morning Edward was tormented by shame. At noon Thurgau told him that the work he had been seconded to do was

finished; and finding, upon inquiry, that Commander Pardoner had returned to Paris, Edward went to see him and asked leave to go home: he wanted to get away from a city in which he had been so hideously betrayed by his self. Commander Pardoner said, 'I should prefer you to remain a few days, Tillotson. We are holding an inter-Allied radar palaver. It is conceivable that you may be able to make yourself useful. It is perfectly meaningless, but it gives a pleasing impression of industry.'

Commander Pardoner went on to speak of talks which his admiral and himself had been having with some Russian and American technical officers. 'Idle persiflage, Tillotson. Amiable chatter about sharing secrets and post-war disarmament. The trouble is that the only politicians one can trust are the Russians.' Edward laughed and said, 'Oh, come off it, sir!'

'I am perfectly serious, Tillotson. Nor is there anything surprising about it. A politician's object in life is to get power. In democratic or oligarchic communities like our own or the American, the politician only has unlimited power in war-time. Naturally, therefore, all democratic politicians have a latent desire for a state of war or near-war, possibly unwitting, and despite manifest attempts to establish peace which are, of course, always ineffectual. But in a tyranny the politician has unlimited power in peace, as in war. On the whole, therefore, unless he is raving mad, and Joe Stalin is very, very sane, such a man will favour peace. If the Russians do not disarm it will be because they dare not trust us.'

Edward was only moderately amused by Commander Pardoner's perversity, his own opinion being that, when it came to politicians, it was absurd to make fine distinctions between a rogue and a scoundrel. He was annoyed at being forced to stay on in Paris. To console him, Commander Pardoner gave him a ticket for an ENSA performance of *The Merchant of Venice* at the Comédie Française, by the Old Vic Company. He went, of course, and it excited him tremendously, he had acted in it at school but never seen it performed before. He took a violent dislike to the self-pitying Antonio, and Portia was exactly the kind of sly, clever bitch he detested; and as for Bassanio, he was obviously a con-man. Poor Shylock, Edward thought, an adult preoccupied with two really important things, money and hate, in that galley! The last lines of the court scene were spoilt for him because when Shylock said 'Send the deed after me and I will sign it', he somehow managed to bite his tongue so badly that he was in considerable pain. When he ran into S.S.O. in the

foyer he still had the tears of pain in his eyes. Commander Pardoner laughed and said, 'Come, come, my boy, it's only a play! And I have news for you.' He did not have time to tell Edward the news at once because at that moment he was accosted by an American army officer and said, 'Here's the young man I've been telling you about, General. Don't pay any attention to his tears, he's sensitive to literature.'

'Why, that's a very fine trait and nothing to be ashamed of,' the general said, and offered Edward his hand. Then he said, 'Why, it's Mister——' and Edward said, hastily, 'Tillotson, sir,' and, 'I hope you're well, Mr.—General Orage.'

'So you know each other,' S.S.O. said.

'Sure, Lipschitz introduced us, isn't that right, Commander Tillotson?'

Edward felt very silly being called 'Commander' by Bayard Orage who, for his part, managed, with the elegance natural to him, to wear his uniform without pretending to be a soldier.

Edward wanted to ask what had been said about him and why. But the two older men talked about the play. When General Orage took leave of Commander Pardoner, he turned to Edward and said, 'We'll be meeting again in 'Zeke Powel's office quite soon, I suppose.' When his bowed back had retreated out of sight Edward said to Commander Pardoner, 'Why shall I be meeting him in Powel's office, sir?'

S.S.O. asked him, then, whether he was not preparing to sign a contract with Llewellyn and Powel for the post-war exploitation of his feed-back device. Edward said that he was, and Commander Pardoner went on, 'I think you'll find a short and insignificant-looking clause giving them world-rights. Powel has already started on the job of selling a licence to Orage. You haven't signed yet, so you're in a strong position. American exploitation of television will develop much quicker than ours. No damned B.B.C. nonsense, Tillotson, no cant about cultural responsibility, just plenty of advertising revenue. Orage's business will be worth fifty times Powel's to you, if you play your hand cleverly, or even just carefully. I've had a word or two with Orage.'

They were walking towards the Hotel Béranger as they talked. Edward halted and looked at Commander Pardoner and said, 'You've always been extraordinarily kind to me, sir.' He shrugged and replied, 'Let us hope, Tillotson, that it will be counted to me for merit. We all enjoy playing providence when we can. Besides,

I am naturally officious. And you know, we all have an uneasy feeling that it would be wise to put as many people as possible under an obligation, now that the war is all but over. I had a fore-warning of what is in store for us, in Brussels last week. The Belgian mechanics employed in one of the R.E.M.E. garages stole the distributor arm of my jeep and sold it back to me for a pound of coffee, under the pretence that it was a new one.'

'I wonder what percentage the R.E.M.E. boys are getting,' Edward said.

'An infamous suggestion, Tillotson. Moreover, I doubt whether they're a match for the natives in a business transaction. It must be a lesson to us. We'll all be doing the best we can for ourselves pretty soon. The first ten years after this war will be a free-for-all scramble. Catch as catch can and no holds barred, eh?'

* * *

Edward tried to telephone Celia from Dover. Her mother said that she had not been sent to Germany, but did not know where she was. But a letter which had been chasing him and had somehow overtaken him at last, was waiting for him at the laboratory, and it provided him with a time-table of her movements as far as she knew them. He worked out that she would be at Dartmouth, doing a piece about the reserve destroyer fleet anchored there. He telephoned the number she had given him and found her in. Neither of them was a telephone-talker; Edward said, 'Powel's down at the works, I'm to see him there on Friday. Can you nip across to Wales and join me at Machynlleth?' He gave her the name of an hotel where the firm's executives had rooms booked for them. Celia said, 'I'll try hard, darling, but only expect me if you see me. I'm going to try for leave.'

'In three days, then.'

'Heaven!'

Hot as he was to see her, the delay was not unwelcome. He was not sure that he could look at her naturally. The next morning he found a note from S.S.O. at the office, marked Private and Confidential. *Orage is here, staying at the Savoy. He will not be surprised if you call him there.* Commander Pardoner's persistent and gratuitous concern for his welfare was disturbing. However, Edward telephoned Orage, who invited him to lunch. He had a slow and serious manner, looked more soldierly in plain clothes than he had done in uniform, and at close quarters across a luncheon table the magnification power of his rimless spectacles gave his eyes a kind of

astonished wildness, like a kitten's. Throughout the meal he tried to get Edward to suggest that as he had not yet signed with Llewellyn and Powel, he might sign directly with N.A.E. Edward could not do it, since Llewellyn and Powel had been responsible for saving his device from Lipschitz; but he did not tell Orage that, he gave the impression that he could sign if he would, but would not; Orage might as well think him the soul of honour. Orage asked him, 'Ever thought of working in the States?' and Edward said that he had not.

'Well, why not think of it? Five years on from the end of the war you could be making twenty or thirty thousand dollars a year!'

Edward said that sounded nice and Orage said, 'But not what you want?'

'I don't know what I want,' Edward said, discovering, with surprise, that this was quite true. All the same, you could not do much without money: he decided to be candid and said, 'I don't want to leave England. I'd like your advice, though.' He hesitated: now that they were out of uniform, should he say 'Sir'? On the whole, not; he went on, 'If we leave things as they are, I mean, if I sign with Llewellyn and Powel, and you get a licence from Powel to manufacture in the United States, what sort of money can I count on for the next few years?'

Orage laughed and said that he could not possibly say. 'Not exactly, of course,' Edward said, 'but you can probably give me an idea. I mean, a thousand a year, pounds not dollars, two, three?'

'I just don't know, son. From the little Powel told me, it couldn't be less than two. It could be twenty.'

That was one of the most satisfying moments in Edward's life. He had once heard an old song with the refrain, '*How pleasant it is to have money, heigh-ho! How pleasant it is to have money!*' He supposed it must have first been sung in very easy times, when the possession of money could be called merely pleasant. Now it was the *sine qua non* condition of freedom, the condition for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. He suddenly felt at ease, safe, *home*; almost what his Uncle Walter would have called justified. He thought of affording the luxuries, truth-telling, candour, the charitable view; travel; owning a few trees in a garden; listening to music he liked, when he liked. Above all, affording generous expression of his love for Celia and the luxury of being always with her. Affording, too, other generosities. He might increase Eileen's subsidy to five pounds a week; there was a weight on his heart and that might take it off.

Tuck a bit of generous conduct away behind you, and you had some capital to draw on when your self pledged your credit and ran you up a bill of guilt.

By the time Edward reached Machynlleth he had begun to think of that large income as if it belonged to him. The firm's three directors were present when his contract with them was discussed. But only Powel counted. David Llewellyn, a short, broad, lively man who talked with the musical lilt of his people, was an engineer, not a business man. As for old Mr. Evans, Edward had only spoken to him twice before. He had been a small Cardiff shipowner. His money had started Llewellyn and Powel, Edward had a vague idea that he was Llewellyn's uncle. He was a bit like the twentieth-century God: in theory one of the powers to be reckoned with, in practice he could be ignored. Edward knew nothing about him excepting that he had the third best collection of seashells in the world.

Powel wore tweeds as beautiful as his London clothes: he could, Edward thought, have gone unchanged into one of those *Esquire* advertisements selling English cloth; he was smooth but male. He was, he said, glad that Edward had made up his mind to come home and do a spot of work. Edward told them, briefly, how he had been shunted about France. It was Llewellyn who broke into this chit-chat to say that he for one had a full IN tray and nothing at all in the OUT one. He picked up a stout document of several folios from Powel's desk and asked, 'You ready, now, to sign this, man?'

Edward said he had not yet read it and Powel said, 'Take it away and bring it back signed.'

'More time wasting!' Llewellyn threw up his short, massive arms and snatched it back from Edward and read the preamble in a fast gabble. Then, coming to the clauses, he began to read more slowly, pausing at the end of each one to raise black, arched eyebrows and wait for Edward's nod. They worked through the eleven clauses and then Llewellyn put the papers down and said, 'Suit you?'

'Sorry,' Edward said. 'No.'

Powel sat up, looked at his polished nails, then at Edward. It was impossible to see, at that moment, that he had an over-bite. He said, 'You . . . What's wrong with it? You realize we hold the . . .'

'None of that, Ezekiel,' Mr. Evans said; he never used the abbreviation. The old man had been so silent that Edward was quite startled. To Edward, he said, 'What's the trouble, then?'

'It leaves me out of any arrangement with the Americans, sir, or for that matter with anyone outside the Commonwealth.'

Powel said, 'Oh, that. It's speculative. Besides, we have to cover our risk.'

'What risk? There isn't one.'

'Is that so? Look, Ed, you had a smart idea . . . once. You'll be living on it for the rest of your life, and having it pretty good . . .' He rapped with his fingers on the agreement and went on, 'Don't generalize from the particular.'

'You mean,' Edward said, 'not to try to be smart all the time?'

Mr. Evans frowned. Llewellyn laughed. A girl put her head round the door and said something in swift Welsh. Llewellyn said, 'Not now, Gladys, *bach*,' and, to Edward, 'Powel doesn't mean . . .' Powel interrupted him, 'Let me handle this, Dai,' but before he could go on Edward said, 'I think I should tell you that I met Bayard Orage in Brussels and talked to him.'

Powel's face went blank. Llewellyn said, 'Orage? Now there's a great engineer, man!' And, looking from Powel's face to Edward's and back, 'Will one of you tell me what's going on here?'

They waited for Powel to speak. He said, curtly, 'I had a preliminary, exploratory talk with Orage. I've not bothered you with it, it's not gone far enough.'

There was a silence. Then Mr. Evans said, 'It would be better, Ezekiel, if you told us everything you are doing, everything whatever. I sometimes have a feeling that I am not being told all that is going on in our firm. Now, that isn't right, Ezekiel.'

Edward saw Powel flush. Dai Llewellyn said quickly, 'Zeke knows what he's doing, cousin Owen.' Cousin, Edward thought, not uncle. Mr. Evans said, peevishly, 'That isn't the point, Dai,' and to Edward, 'What did Mr. Bayard Orage say to you?' 'That if it was his firm I was signing with,' Edward replied, 'I could look forward to ten thousand a year.'

'Preposterous!' Powel said.

'Dollars, of course?' Llewellyn suggested.

'Pounds, I gathered,' Edward said.

Old Mr. Evans, sounding very Welsh, asked him, 'What do you want, Edward Tillotson?'

'The same share as this agreement offers me, but on the world market, not just the home one. But leaving you free to grant licences on whatever terms you can get. Orage to have an option of, say, six months, before you sign with any other American. I want a guaranteed minimum of three thousand a year, half of it salary, but called expenses, and the other half advance against inventor's royalties.'

The three directors all looked at the contract where it lay on the table. Powel shrugged, Llewellyn nodded. Old Mr. Evans said, 'We will have the agreement amended in that sense.' There followed a silence; Edward, exultant, had difficulty in keeping the smile off his face and was obliged to frown. Powel said, 'You'd better take two weeks off and then get down to work, Ed.' Old Mr. Evans rose, patted Edward's shoulder as he passed him, and said, 'I must be getting along.' He left them.

'I heard you were cheated of your honeymoon,' Dai Llewellyn said.

'Yes, that's right, I was.' Edward looked at his watch and added, brightly, 'But I'm meeting my wife at the *Royal Angler* in twenty minutes.'

Rising, Powel said, 'Want to borrow my cottage for a fortnight? It's furnished now. I'm not using it.'

Edward remembered about the cottage: he said, 'I'd be most awfully grateful, 'Zeke.'

'Two rooms,' Powel said, 'but the roof and walls are sound——' Llewellyn, as if impatient with the proprietor's deprecatory tone, burst out, 'It's a grand little place! Man, you've the Menai Strait at your feet and all Anglesey behind you! Did you ever fish for bass?'

'Don't listen to him,' Powel said, laughing, 'or you'll be involved in more misery than a front-line soldier!'

'I never fished for anything,' Edward said.

'Edward Tillotson, you must try it! Powel lent me the place last week and you'll find my tackle there. The morning tide's the one. There's days it means rising at four and standing out there on the rocks in the wind and rain, why not for the chance of an eight-pound fish, and that's what you'll catch if you use a live sand-eel for bait.'

'It sounds grand.'

'Grand's the word for it. You'll take the place?'

'Good heavens, yes, of course, if 'Zeke really means it.'

'Why wouldn't he mean it?'

Powel said, 'You're welcome, Ed, but don't let Dai's raptures lead you to expect too much,' and walked out of the room. Llewellyn said, 'When you get there, light a fire of paper in the hearth. The smoke will bring Evan George up from the valley. He'll get you anything you want and he'll teach you to fish. Evan George is dumb.'

'Dumb? English or American dumb?'

'English. He can't speak. You'll find he makes himself understood, though.'

Waiting in the yard for one of the firm's trucks to run him into the town, which was two miles away, Edward felt guilty of extortion. And they had been so kind to him afterwards! He felt absolutely no right to the money he had demanded. He had exulted, yet he was ashamed. It seemed to him that if, as seemed clear, the three Welshmen thought him worth what he had asked, they were deceived in him. What they had conceded him would be a burden to carry.

At the *Royal Angler* Edward saw Celia the moment he entered the bar, and it was, for a moment, as if he had not known her before, as if she was quite new to him. What struck him hard was that she was herself, integral and independent, not a kind of extension of himself. Although what she was doing was what he recognized at once as characteristic, it was not something he could have imagined her doing: she had one foot resting on a happily recumbent red setter, and to make this pleasanter for both him and herself she had kicked off one shoe. From time to time she dug into the dog's fur with her toes. Her head was drawn sharp and clear and beautiful against the empty mockery of the fancier alcohol bottles ranged behind the bar. The setter's owner was a stout man of fifty, with a bright, massive face. He wore a red flannel waistcoat under his old tweed coat. Celia, seeing Edward as soon as he entered the bar, set the tone for this too public reunion by saying, 'Darling! So punctual! This is Mr. Jones and he has been telling me about catching trout. My husband.'

Edward was suddenly intensely irritated. But what had he wanted? That her feelings should be too much for her respect for her dignity, that if anyone was to remember what was due to face, in a public place, it should be him. He said, 'Trout's all right. Bass is my fish, actually.'

Celia looked at him sharply. The man Jones said, 'Ah, now that's interesting,' and, 'You'll take whisky, Mister . . . ?'

'Tillotson. Thanks.'

Celia's sharp look had changed to one of surprise.

'Bass,' Edward said, 'caught as they come up the Strait on a small-hours tide driven by wind and rain.'

'I know those mornings,' Mr. Jones said, and, 'What weight of fish would you expect to take, now? Will it be like playing a salmon?'

'I daresay. Though eight pounds is about the limit.' Edward raised his glass and said, 'Here's to fishing!'

'Darling,' Celia said, 'you're full of surprises.'

'Aren't I? And one of them's nice. I've got a cottage on the Strait for a week.'

'Edward! But how . . .'

She was suddenly natural, very pleased with the prospect. Mr. Jones, with ready tact, said, 'I must be away to me work.' He called a greeting in Welsh to the woman behind the bar. Edward explained to Celia that Powel was lending them his cottage—'two rooms but no sanitation.'

'Who cares about sanitation? We shall have privacy,' she said, and as if she had been there already, 'It'll be one of those tiny white-washed cob or stone places with slate roofs, like a child's drawing of a cottage.'

They went up to her room. It seemed to Edward as many years as it was actually months since they had been together. The idea of being isolated with her in a remote cottage for a week suddenly struck him with near-panic. He had been mad not to find a reason for refusing Powel's offer. He did not see how to get back over the obstacles he had been raising between himself and Celia, to where they had been before he went to France. An ordinary, even much longer, parting, could have been set at nought by each of them consenting to be for the other an image of a beloved. But the time parting them contained events so powerful in changing his own image of himself (the starting point of any such consent, any such adaptation), that he was bound to appear strange to Celia; and to behave awkwardly.

Up in their room he kept away from her, walking about too much, commenting on his unpacking, making too much of his own uninteresting adventures, assuming a measure of anxiety over his Uncle Walter whom, after all, Celia did not know and which was more than he really felt. His self, his I, had involved him in so much that he could neither repudiate nor confess to. It made Celia, who had turned to him happily and candidly as soon as the door closed on them, as constrained as himself. She became bright and chatty in her turn; and, wondering what was wrong with him, watchful. There crept into her manner as she talked while Edward washed and changed, a touch of resentment. That entailed a change in his image of her. His thinking, as he buried his face in the towel and scrubbed at it with unnecessary vigour, became extraordinarily vulgar: he conceived of Celia as reminding herself, whenever he behaved in a manner which was unsatisfactory, not that she loved him but that

with her face, figure and opportunities she could have 'done much better' for herself. That, Edward considered, was thinking, feeling, by Powell's standard. But at least it was one which left elbow-room, room for action: combing his hair, he began to boast, starting by saying that, Oh, by the way, he'd forgotten to mention that they were going to be quite rich.

'Rich?'

'What is called, at least, comfortably off.'

Celia, sitting on the bed, was looking past his back at his face in the looking-glass; he at hers in the same glass. That way, he could face her candidly. She was smiling, ready enough to be impressed, pleased, but still confused by his manner. Edward reminded her about the preliminary agreement he had made with Powell before he went away, and said, 'We've been battling over terms this morning. As it happened, I was in a much stronger position than I expected to be.'

He turned round and offered her a cigarette and took one himself and lit them and told her about Bayard Orage. She said, 'Oh, but I met him. At a Press conference. He's rather a pet.'

'I daresay. He's bidding L. and P. for the American rights of my thing. He bought me lunch at the Savoy. He's the prophet of our riches.'

'What did he say, exactly?'

Edward found that he did not want to tell her. Something manifest as a physical coldness within the breast was spreading through him at the revelation, to himself, of his own inability to be open with her. But to repeat what Orage had said would be like making a contract at bridge: he was afraid of overbidding, yet anxious to appear big and lucky. He looked at the tip of his cigarette in a stagy sort of way and said, 'Suppose we're to have something over three thousand a year, perhaps a lot over, how do you want to live?'

'But, Edward, *are* we? You're being a little odd, darling.'

'There's nothing odd about the contract I'm signing with L. and P., and that guarantees us a minimum of three thousand a year.'

She got up and came over to kiss him, not seriously though, and said, 'Honestly, I don't know what to say. You'll be justifiably cross if I say, "Are you sure?" But—perhaps you don't realize it—you've somehow given me the impression that money was a thing you're no good at, that we'd probably never have any. That was all right with me. Now you suddenly tell me this . . .'

'I didn't want to shout the odds till I was sure,' Edward said,

trying hard to keep the note of irrational anger out of his voice. That was the kind of lie by implication he was learning to tell; and to believe. Celia said, quickly, 'No, of course not, darling. But it does rather shake one up. Oh, very agreeably. I mean, any to come glad of it as the punters say.'

He realized that the air had suddenly cleared. Celia probably thought that she now had the explanation of the uneasiness of their reunion. This news had been his preoccupation; and because money was not, as they were beginning to say, his 'thing', he had been behaving awkwardly. That explanation worked for her and consequently, although it was wrong, worked for Edward, too. They were both easy. She sat on the bed and patted it and he sat beside her and put an arm round her, and she said, 'So we're going to have money. I suppose three thousand a year can be called money? Shall we live in the country? All the towns are broken. I hate broken things.'

* * *

When they reached the cottage, Edward lit a fire with the packing of the provisions they had brought with them from the factory's canteen store. Smoke rose in a column from white-washed chimney stack. Edward explained that Powel had written to Evan George: that signal would fetch him. They went out and stood in the sunshine in front of the house. Celia asked about the great grass-topped, bird-haunted rock out in the Strait. They heard the sound of a motor-cycle engine somewhere near the bottom of the hill on the other side of the house. Edward said, 'That will be Evan George, no doubt.' He told her what Dai Llewellyn had told him about the rock. It was called St. Yreix's Stone. Once the devil tried to invade Anglesey by swimming the Strait in the guise of a great conger, escorted by imps changed into fishes. St. Yreix threw a stone at them from this cliff. 'It frightened the devil away. That's the saint's stone.'

'What happened to Yreix?' Celia said.

'The poor fellow was martyred by a heathen Dane, a king of Londonderry called Garfang or some such name. Yreix is the only saint in the martyrology to be martyred by keel-hauling.'

'Poor Yreix!'

'Ah, well, it was done under the local defence of the realm act, you see; he was probably one of those clergymen who take Christianity seriously, and was teaching Garfang's men to turn the other cheek. No government can put up with that.'

Evan was getting off his motorcycle in front of the house. He was a big, quiet-faced man with pale grey eyes and a natural tonsure

surrounded by a woolly fringe of dead-looking orange hair. He came to them, smiling shyly. He was not deaf and was quick to understand what was required of him. Celia smiled at Evan and said something about trying not to be a nuisance. The man answered her in a series of throatal sounds, inarticulate, but conveying goodwill. His gestures were wide, emphatic and full of meaning. Edward said, 'Dai says Evan was a fisherman. Now, he does not go out much. He's part-time odd-job man up at the Lloyd-Conway Hospital.'

'That hideous pink granite place in the valley? What sort of hospital is it?' Celia said.

'It used to be a loony-bin. The War Office has it now, as a rehabilitation centre for war-nerves cases. Officers only. The man in charge is a Colonel Dalrymple . . .'

Evan's eyes went from speaker to speaker. He made sympathetic gurgling sounds. And watching him in his speechlessness Edward became conscious that from the whole vast surface of the globe rose at that and every moment a great clamour of words in five or six hundred languages. Probably in any one minute of the day or night something like 150,000 million words were whispered, spoken loud, shouted, bawled, howled, muttered, screamed, yelled or otherwise uttered; and of these hundreds of thousands of millions, tens or hundreds of millions were relayed, recorded, broadcast, scrambled and unscrambled, transmitted and amplified. Thus an inconceivable uproar was rising to heaven as they stood there before the whispering sea and below the wailing gulls, a volume of noise beyond conception great and terrible, and of which every monosyllabic element was uttered as a significant expression of some mind or soul. And not a sound reached them of all that cry. Nothing but the whisper of the sea and the wail of the gulls. And Edward had only to glance at Evan to be quite certain that of every thousand words, nine hundred and ninety-nine served absolutely no purpose.

Celia said that she would get a meal, and invited Evan. He shook his head and made them understand by two grunts and a gesture that he was wanted at the hospital. But first he got out some of David Llewellyn's fishing tackle and there, on the cliff-top, gave them a lesson in casting. Celia quickly lost interest, and saying that she had not the strength for it in her wrists, left them. For Edward there was pleasure in standing high above the sea in salty air and clear, mild sunshine, swinging the long rod and making the weighted line describe its wide, sweet curve. Nine-tenths of him were occupied

with the glory of his own body and its sensations; the other tenth played with the pleasure of seeking a mathematical expression for the trajectory of the weighted hook through space.

Just before Evan left, Edward pointed to St. Yreix's Stone and asked him if one could land on it. Certainly, no trouble at all, said his emphatic nod and brightening eyes. There would be sea-birds there, Edward thought, and rocks, and short, crisp turf to lie on. He saw Evan away on his ancient machine, after they had come to an understanding that he would call to take Edward fishing not the following morning but the next. Meanwhile, Edward was to practise casting.

'I must be up at five for it,' he told Celia, watching her do what she could with dried egg and spam. She smiled; she said, stabbing her fork contemptuously towards the contents of the pan, 'I hope we can do better than this.'

They could: later in the day, while they were down on the beach poking about in rock-pools left by the ebbing tide and taking keen pleasure in the small creatures they found in them, and calling to each other across the vast beach to 'come and look at this!', Evan must have visited them again, for on the kitchen table they found a basket of eggs, strong-tasting butter, and four trout. Nor was that all they found on their return, for sitting on the low dry-stone wall which separated the cottage garden from the edge of the cliff was a tall, lean man in khaki shorts and shirt. The small, shining baldness of his head and the roundness of his heavily rimmed spectacles gave him the look of an insect.

'Hallo, there!' he called, as soon as they came in sight, and demonstrating ease by not rising. 'I thought I'd make a neighbourly call. I saw your smoke. My name's Dalrymple.'

They introduced themselves and apologized for having nothing to drink in the house.

'Oh, we're better without it,' he said.

'Not me,' Edward said, and, 'You're the C.O. of the Lloyd-Conway hospital, aren't you?'

'For my sins, yes.'

Celia said that she would make tea; and having by then discovered Evan's provisions, invited him to stay. He said it was kind of her, but he would not stay.

'Walking up the hill and down again is all the time away from one's job that one allows oneself. I should not do that, really. We're short-handed. But one isn't oneself without half an hour's gentle exercise,

eh? I get a game of squash with some of my inmates, but that's more of a strain than a relaxation.'

He bore his 'niceness' about with him, like a little banner, waving it from time to time in his ever-so-whimsical smile.

'You have violent cases?' Edward said, making talk.

'Dear me, no. My inmates are people who want to die, not to inflict death. That's the trouble with them, you see. Man is a predator. If he stops wanting to inflict death, there is nothing much left. The strain I referred to is that of stimulating them to want to win, to inflict a little death on me.'

Edward said, 'I see.' The colonel went on, 'Why don't you and your lady wife walk down to see us one evening?' As if in protest a violent sizzling, originating in the frying pan, reached them through the kitchen window. 'It would be a work of charity,' he continued. 'Isn't visiting the sick counted to one for merit?' He took off his spectacles and polished them carefully on a small piece of chamois leather pulled from his hip-pocket. Uncovered, the eyes were weak, unconfident, hiding shyly behind long, lowered lashes.

'I'll ask my wife,' Edward said, and went into the cottage. '

Celia had heard. She said, 'Dam' that for a tale. You go if you think you must. I'm having nothing to do with a man who calls me your lady wife.'

When he returned to Colonel Dalrymple he had risen and was staring out across the Strait. He said he must be going. Edward promised to call one evening, alone or with Celia.

'Oh, bring Mrs. Tillotson,' he said, 'it helps my chaps to see a bit of company. Helps 'em all the more to see a pretty girl.' About that he was not even faintly jocular, but vaguely clerical, curatical.

The morning of Edward's dawn-tide initiation into bass-fishing from the rocks started a short Indian summer of radiant, cloudless days with the temperature in the seventies. For two hours he stood on the extreme point of the promontory of rocks, with the tide racing past, casting the sand-eel bait farther and farther out into the Strait as he came nearer and nearer to a successful imitation of Evan's tireless wielding of the rod, and distracted, from time to time, by the spectacle of colour being slowly infused into the dozen different greys which sea and sky and rock had been made of. At one moment the sky above the dark mainland to the east was striped green and orange; the orange faded to rose, the green to aquamarine, violet, blue. Evan caught two three-pound fish in the first half an hour. Edward caught none until he was thinking of giving up. Then

he hooked a bass which Evan, with upheld fingers, estimated at six pounds, and pounded his back as if he were responsible for that. Edward was indescribably excited. He understood, in that moment, why rich men spend their money on getting back to an Old Stone Age economy. But it was Evan who cleaned the fish. Evan, too, who rowed them out to the Yreix Stone two hours later, and undertook to fetch them off again later in the afternoon.

For Edward, and perhaps for Celia, it seemed that nothing had ever had such power to exalt the mind, tranquillize the heart, and make them so keenly aware of the body's sensibilities, as the seas and skies, the motion of tides and clouds and gulls, the colours and movements of rock-pool denizens, the small, humming life which inhabited the sun-warmed turf of the Yreix Stone. Every cloudless morning Evan brought his boat round to their beach. He would take them to the Yreix Stone and leave them there with wood for fire, a kettle and a pan and such other gear and provision as they needed; the fishing tackle with which Edward became hourly more handy; and books, although they did little reading. Edward's, all that week, was *Die Mathematik der Mayas*. But Ludwig Aaronsohn's great book was, perhaps, too severe a corrective to their sensualism; or it may have been that the German philosopher's involved sentences were too much for Edward's rusty German. So that although he had long wished to understand the Maya use of the zero and their system to the base twenty, he made little progress with the book and, when Celia slept in the sun, abandoned Aaronsohn for her copy of *Mansfield Park*.

They swam, naked, for hours; they lay on the short grass in the sun; they made love; they studied, with the minute, slow pleasure of infinite leisure, the leaves and flowers and stalks of thrift and thyme and sedum and a small, purple statice. Edward fished, and since all Europe and half Asia was then living on rationed scraps of the basest kind of eating-matter, he may, perhaps, have recaptured some of the anxiety, some of the excitement of the men who once fished for dear life and not for sport or wage. They rejoiced, like children, in finding shrimps and small brown and green crabs, and the pool-trapped, diversely beautiful fry of many fishes. They watched cormorants dive for mackerel and, all one day, were entertained by a pair of gannets. They shrimped the falling tide with a huge net Evan lent them, crouching excitedly over it at the end of each sweep, sorting the shrimps from tiny plaice and soles, three-inch conger-eels, frantic crablets and jelly-fish of pale beige most beautifully

shot with mauve. Twice, at the slack of the tide, they swam side by side from the Yreix Stone to their own beach below the house, leaving Evan to fetch off their things, landing nearly exhausted and spending the afternoons walking the vast beach of wet and gleaming sand and rocky massifs draped with green and brown weed, peering into fresh rock-pools, combing the tide-wrack for the strange, small detritus of sea-animals and ships, and racing each other over a paced quarter-mile of level sand.

On the last day of their week, when they returned to the cottage they found a note secured to the doorstep by a stone. It was from Dalrymple: *Sorry to miss you. Any hope of seeing you at our 'social evening' tonight? You'll be very welcome.* Even scribbling that note on his knee or the cottage doorpost he had self-consciously put the vulgarism of *social evening* between inverted commas.

It was a feeling of wanting to give thanks which made Edward suggest that they should go; after all, he had never agreed with his uncle that there was no merit in works.

'I don't want to break our privacy,' Celia said.

'Nor do I. But I don't think it will.'

'All right.'

It was still very warm. They walked down the hillside side by side, seeing a brown and buff world less fresh than their own. From time to time, as on their wedding-day, their hands touched and their little fingers entwined in mutual reassurance.

The party was on the lawn, contained between the central block and the side wings of the hospital. Afterwards Edward recalled little about it: for when some object looms very large and demanding of attention in the foreground, all beyond it becomes, as it were, invisible. The object which fulfilled this condition for him as they stepped off the path on to the grass and moved towards the group of deck-chairs, bentwood chairs, tables and young men and women, and as Dalrymple detached himself from that group to come to them, was David Mendoza, imperfectly disguised by dark glasses, taking a glass of what might be wine from the hand of a girl in nurse's uniform.

For some reason Edward was astounded; not having seen him for so long, he must have been thinking of David as dead, or as never having had any real existence. As for the 'coincidence' of thus coming upon him, there was nothing more likely: *Chi non muore si rivede*. As a soldier—and he would have joined the army even if he had not been conscribed—sooner or later he would have lost his

nerve. Not, Edward thought, that it would have been danger, fear, that brought Edward to Dalrymple's hospital: boredom, disgust, the horror of living without privacy in order to inflict death, one or all of these would have brought him to that pass. It was as the colonel had said: a man who no longer wanted to inflict death was done for, mad. These were Edward's thoughts.

When David saw him it seemed to Edward that his friend's face lost all colour; yet he could not be certain that it had not been as pale already. Vaguely aware of Celia and Dalrymple exchanging civilities at his side, he went through a small crowd of men and one or two women making talk and said, 'Hallo, David.'

'This is a very nice surprise, Edward,' Mendoza said, his eyes lowered, and speaking in the thin and waspish tone he had once used to offer Edward money for a service. Edward supposed that David was reproaching him for the fact that their meeting was a casual one; that chance and not intention had brought it about.

'How did you . . .' he began, and then hesitated, feeling that he was being clumsy.

'Fall into the colonel's clutches?' David said.

'You could put it that way.'

'My dear, you couldn't put it any other way. I went out of my mind after Walcheren.'

'Good God, were you in that?'

Dalrymple's voice, conscientiously benevolent, bleated at Edward's elbow: 'Ah, Major Mendoza, I see you've made a friend.' Major, Edward thought; David was in plain clothes so that he had not known. Edward looked round uneasily for Celia; she was talking to one of the nurses. David said, 'Oh, I've known Tillotson for years.'

'Happy reunion, then,' Dalrymple said, and, 'Quite a benefit day for you. One old friend on his way from London, and another out of the blue!' He moved away, smiling like a rather old curate, towards some other group. As soon as he was out of hearing, Edward said, 'What friend, from London?' David ignored the question and said, 'I can't bear it! If it weren't that he'd never do anything out of line, I'd take him for a bloody Buchmanite.'

'Are you better now? What . . . well, I mean, what happened when you came here?'

'If you mean am I sane, say so, Edward. The answer is, I have no idea. When I came here they put me to sleep in a cell with an

observation window. They fed my body with a tube and kept me asleep, and they peered at me through the hole in the wall, Dalrymple and his underlings. When I was allowed to be awake again, they said I was better. What have you been doing in the great war to save democracy? Only, make it brief, for God's sake. Excepting for the subjects of America, Russia and Mr. Churchill, in that order, war is the champion monumental bore, and in the condition old Frankie Dalrymple's reduced me to, I can't take it.'

'I accidentally invented a radio gadget. It got me a soft number. I've collected no honours'—Edward saw him flush—'only a large income.'

Something of his old manner returned; his eyes brightened. He said, 'Thank God for you! You don't think I wanted what they gave me, do you? They sneaked up on me while I was busy killing their opposite numbers over there, and later when I was blacked out. But I'll bet it was no accident that kept you clear of this filthy brawl. You always had the makings.'

Edward did not want to talk about that; there was a mixture of envy and contempt in David's manner which embarrassed him. He said, 'What are you going to do now?'

'What, indeed? My father is being very tiresome. He considers that I should work for my money. My own idea is to turn hermit.'

'Hermit?'

'Coming up through Italy—I was with the Eighth Army for a year—I came across rather a nice villa, not far from Sorrento. It was empty—the local partisans had hanged the owner from his bedroom balcony. A few of us were entertained by a man called Gela, Count Gela, the biggest landowner in Southern Italy. He arranged for me to see the place. I want to buy it.'

'What will you do there?'

David shrugged and said, 'Cultivate my garden. I haven't got it yet. My father can't quite queer my pitch—there's always Mummy, thank God.'

Edward was not attending to him with more than the skin of his mind. It had suddenly struck him that he was behaving treacherously: he had not even mentioned Celia. In a way which he did not understand, he was afraid to. He swallowed the drink which someone had put into his hand, and said, 'I say, there's someone here I want you to——' and before he could complete the sentence knew that he should have tried to avoid the introduction this was leading up to. 'Someone——' David prompted. He looked earnestly at

Edward and deliberately removed the dark glasses he was wearing. It seemed to Edward that his friend's face was paler than ever; and his eyes, exposed, were full of an intensified chronic anxiety. Edward became aware of a presence, a faint, sour body odour: Dalrymple was with them again, saying, 'Your wife's been telling me, Tillotson, that you're an angler. I was wondering——' 'Your wife?' David said. They looked at each other. Dalrymple might not have existed. Edward looked away from David's eyes. Dalrymple withdrew to attend to a new arrival. Celia was moving through the crowd towards them, smiling vaguely. Edward called, 'Celia! Here a minute.' He took her hand as she came within range and drew her forward, with his heart beating uncomfortably hard. He said, 'This is David Mendoza. David, Celia.'

Celia looked surprised and said, 'Edward's always talking about you, Mr. Mendoza.' David stared at her, his face sully. Edward was aware of Dalrymple approaching again, accompanied by an officer in uniform with the red tabs of the Staff. David said to Celia, 'Is he? Such a bore for you. How d'ye do?' His eyes shifted from her to a point over Edward's shoulder. Although his face did not change his voice sounded the correct note of pleasure as he exclaimed, 'Michael! My dear fellow! This is really friendly.' Edward half turned and his face lost all colour. Dalrymple, beaming, was saying, 'Mr. and Mrs. Tillotson, Colonel Custer-Dwyer.' Custer-Dwyer was shaking, then holding, David's hand. Edward did not hear what they said to each other. Celia watched Edward's face; her own was cold, without indulgence; she might be asking herself what she was doing in that galley. Then Colonel Custer-Dwyer was speaking to Edward with a singular light in his eye, the light of mischief proper to a child: a depraved child. He said, 'Well, Tillotson, how's the world treating you?' Edward managed to say, 'All right, thank you.'

'Saw an old chum of yours no longer ago than yesterday,' the colonel continued. He paused, and with a quick, cruel glance at Celia, said, 'In Paris.' Celia looked, coldly inquiring, at Edward, who said, 'Really?' and made a movement to withdraw. 'Doris,' the colonel said and turning to David, 'You never met her, did you? Gone to the bad, as they used to say. A *poule de luxe*——' he turned to Celia and said, 'Saving your presence, Mrs. Tillotson.' He looked, and bore himself, like one of those professional army officers who occasionally publish a volume of verse almost worthy to be called poetry. Celia remained grave. 'Fortunately,' Custer-

Dwyer went on, 'Doris's old chums aren't particular, eh, Tillotson? She told me you had a jolly romp together.'

* * *

The evening light behind the Yreix Stone was the colour of autumn crocus. For the fourth time Edward said, 'I tell you the meeting was accidental.'

'Was it?'

'Yes, it was. You know perfectly well Custer-Dwyer has it in for me.'

'So you say.'

'Christ. I told you at the time——'

'Oh, yes, you *told* me.'

At last they fell silent. They were sitting on the wall outside the cottage. The autumn-crocus sky turned to cyclamen and green. Edward offered Celia a cigarette. She took one and he lit it for her. She said, 'There's the things you tell me. And the things you don't.'

'What things that I don't?' he said, aggressively. She made no answer. With a feeling as physically uncomfortable as acute hunger, he wanted to tell her about Eileen and her son Arthur. He said nothing. Celia's face was set in lines of anger. Presently she got up and said, 'I'm going in. I don't know. I don't know what sort of a man you are.' Her tone was one of resentful disappointment.

PART THREE

**' . . . who is he who will affirm that there must be
a web of flesh and bone to hold the shape of love?
William Faulkner**

I

EDWARD was going to be late. A potential client, Mr. Sudhindra Nath Das, kept him at the office, not talking of the business between them, but going on and on about the difficulties Indian national feeling would put in the way of his placing the contract with Llewellyn and Powel. The sparsely scored music of his Oriental voice, to Edward's ears a monotonous whine, was intensely irritating until, while keeping the deferentially attentive look firmly stuck to his face, Edward began picturing an oscillograph of that merciless rise and fall, rise and fall, and considering its scarce harmonics. It would be a contribution to the forwarding of the Voice-Fabricator which he had been working on, in his leisure moments, in the laboratory. Not that he had had much leisure since Llewellyn had quarrelled with Powel and left the firm to join a brother in Colombia; and he, Edward, had been made a director. Powel gave him all the dirty work. Mr. Das, for instance. But he hardly heard what Das was saying. The Indian's voice rose—*Naturally*, he said—a series of squeaks with a curious guttural about the double L, almost Welsh—*Naturally, I myself am free from such prejudice. Colonialism, imperialism . . .* He lifted his little brown hands and made a funny face . . . *but one is the servant of one's country, and one's country is one's people . . .* the imaginary oscillograph trace rose exactly as far above the line as it sank below it, each peak and trough equal to the last . . . *and a people, Mister Tillotson, is the sum of their prejudices. Yess, yess, yess, that is so.*

Edward got rid of him at last, wondering if his long epilogue to their business discussion had been a more or less subtle plea for some sort of personal compensation in return for flouting the vulgar prejudices of his nation. Well, if so, that was Powel's job. Edward had no power to bribe and corrupt on behalf of Llewellyn and Powel.

Even the new TL.4 did not enable him to drive fast through the traffic of a Friday night in summer. He was over half an hour late by the time he reached the beginning of the arterial road. Yesterday the pile of old motor-car tyres in the wasteland triangle had been a hill; now it was a mountain of rubber. Held up by the red light he

could hear the juke-box in the pull-up facing the rubber dump; a female tenor with serious throat trouble was bawling a jazz-carol above the thumping of stationary diesel engines in the traffic block. *Liddle boy Jesus, lyin' in de straw*, she snarled; the snarl of engines answered her as the green light released them.

Edward used the TL.4's acceleration, improved by David Mendoza's race mechanics, to make up a little time. That attracted a police patrol. The complacent authority expressed by the arm which peremptorily waved him down and into the side of the road infuriated him. But the police, that week, were being more sorrowful than angry: the senior of the pair spoke to him as to a thoughtless child. The anger inside him was like acid indigestion. He had always been afraid of the police in a generalized way; getting into the police-paying classes had turned that fear into truculence. But Celia had trained him to swallow his back-answers. All he said was, 'It wasn't dangerous. Not in this car.' The policeman, with nursery-maid patience, pointed out that he had not said that Edward's driving was *dangerous*; only that it was *inconsiderate*. Edward prayed silently, Christ give me patience; if he spoke the policeman might get really cross and slap him or stand him in the corner wearing a placard saying E. Tillotson is a nasty, rude boy. With solemn care, as if it were a small work of piety, the policeman read his driving licence and insurance certificate. They let him go at last, and he drove with one eye on the rear-view mirror, sure that they would follow him; they did.

Thus shadowed by the law, he crawled in the reeking, clamorous stream past the filling-stations and pull-ups, through the one-time hamlets now absorbed into the long serpentine squalor of the road, past the neo-Jacobean drinking-hells, through the twenty-house to the acre estates, their TV and VHF antennae bristling like quills upon the fretful propentine, each quill an assurance that that house was paying him a few pence in annual royalty. Through the ten to an acre section, past the converted barn roadhouses with romantic names, and into the four to the acre zone, the Noël Coward country, where the model ceased to be Jacobean and became Georgian. So out of the new-houses belt entirely, and into the land of the old tarted-up, the genuine English countryside, its foreground the grass verge discoloured by oil fumes, its middle plane the cottages with notices saying Teas, Eggs, Bedding-plants, its background the pretty houses, the old red tiles and new yellow thatch, the houses where hotch-cha-cha had been added to hey-nonny-nonny and

even, as Celia said, the 'bloody 'olly'ocks' looked two-dimensional, illustrations, front-covers to magazines about home and garden.

Several cars crowded the drive of his own specimen of this house-class. Powel's Bentley was there; he had left Edward to cope with Mr. Das to have time for another go at Celia: he was persistent, he had read in a book that perseverance was the thing. Behind the Bentley was Canon Cromer's Siddeley-Deasy, the brasses of its acetylene lamps as bright yellow as the rudbeckia in Celia's herbaceous border. It was in the Siddeley-Deasy that the Canon had won what the newspapers call the Old Crocks' Race. Nor was the Canon's passion for superannuated ironmongery as dotty as it seemed: as Powel said, the smartest P.R. man in the business could hardly have thought up anything apter to get him more than his fair share of front page space.

Bast trailing from the pocket of his sackcloth apron, Vinson, well into the skin of his part as an olde tyme gardener, shambled up as Edward got out of his car, saying, with relish, 'One of 'em run over the corner of the lawn. I told 'em, I says, the master'll create about this, and small wonder.' Edward had come to suspect Vinson's Sussex burr of being as reconstructed as the lych-gate of the village churchyard. Edward moved towards the house, just as David's town car entered the drive and pulled up behind the Canon's antique. They went in together. David was still wearing a black tie in mourning for his mother. Celia backed into the hall as they entered it, saying to someone in the drawing-room full of noise, '... my dear, no! Total historectomy. The lot! And now, of course, she's convinced she'll be growing a beard and moustache.' Above the noise of the hi-fi record-player dispensing a too sonorous version of something from *Salad Days*, Edward heard Cynthia Carol's voice answering, 'My dear, such an improvement!' Celia, turning, seeing them, said, 'Hallo, David' and, to Edward, 'You might bloody-well be in time for once.' She crossed the hall to the kitchen. David said, 'Oh, dear, Oh dear!'

'I'm going up to wash,' Edward said. 'Want to come?'

'No. I'd better go in.'

When Edward came down a few minutes later, David and Canon Cromer were standing at the drinks table discussing poacher trouble. David said that Mr. Mendoza senior was losing five hundred pheasants a year from his East Anglian estate. 'Not that my father ever shot a bird in his life. He says, you know, that he is practically a Buddhist in such matters. Besides, he's very short-sighted. But

he has to have the shooting for business friends. The pheasants cost him two pounds a head to rear.' Edward knew that David was making this up: he never saw his father.

'Do they, indeed?' the Canon said. 'My own cost me rather less, five-and-thirty shillings if I can trust my gamekeeper's figures. I often wonder what the old King would have said to such costs!' The Canon raised a hand and lowered it slowly, contriving thus to express what, doubtless, would have been the old King's consternation. 'I well remember,' he continued, his round, bland, Anglo-Saxon mug well-remembering, 'when he, George V you know, came to shoot over the duke's preserves in my first parish, and the duke was good enough to invite me—I fancy they were short of a gun . . .' David's face was politely attentive, but when the Canon moved away, his glass refilled with Tio Pepe, to button-hole Hugh Carol who was sorting discs by the record-player (Carol was North American Electrics' London man and Bayard Orage's son-in-law), he said, 'I don't see how the old boy does it. His place is something like a thousand acres, isn't it?'

'Eight hundred.'

'Do Anglican canons have expense accounts?'

'I don't see why not. They say the C. of E.'s very forward-looking nowadays. They have advertising and public relations, so why not expense accounts? Anyway, his brother's the Cromer of Cromer, Weinthal and van Tilden.'

The record-player was giving them *Oh, what a beautiful morning*. Cynthia Carol, looking old despite ash-blond hair dressed as a close-fitting helmet, came to talk to Edward, saying, 'Who's the character swathed in bandages who keeps talking about his friendship with some Kraut politician?'

'Maxie Grenfell.'

'From the bits you can see through the bandages it looks more like Grunfeldt.'

Edward suffered the flicker of resentment, the small heart-pain of shame. Celia, arriving at the table for three gins and tonics and a sherry, said, 'It was. At least the accident got rid of the R.A.F. moustache. I can't think why we have him.'

'Because,' Edward said, 'he owns the Old Rectory. In subruralia you invite houses, not people.'

'Grenfell,' Cynthia said. 'Isn't he the man who publishes high-brow pornography?'

'Careful!' Edward said. 'Don't forget he was acquitted by an

Old Bailey court. It turned out to be literature he was publishing.'

'Anyway, who beat him up?'

'Nobody beat him up,' Edward said, mixing his drink. 'He was thrown, out hunting.'

Carol, still by the record-player, put on a new disc and the harsh, gay voice of Ethel Merman sang *Call me madam*.

'You mean there's a hunt? *Here?*' Cynthia said.

'The Old West Sturry. M.F.H., Sir Guzman Bayonese—the never-never furniture shops man. There's a story that his hounds once took him for a fox and that he gave them the best run they'd ever had. He doesn't ride himself, to hounds or anything else. But he writes cheques.'

'But it's impossible, West Sturry's a *suburb*. I know, because you go there on a red bus, not a green one.'

'A lot you know about buses,' Powel said, joining the group at that moment.

'You can see the destination boards quite clearly from inside a Cadillac,' Edward explained, and, grinning at Powel, 'Or a Bentley for that matter.'

Carol had again changed the disc on the record-player. Cynthia said, 'I like this tune,' and began quietly singing the words . . . *I hear music and there's no one there*. She broke off and said, 'So Mr. Grenfell was hurt in the hunting-field. Who'd've thought it?'

'Poor Maxie's downfall was a perambulating fried-fish shop,' Edward said. 'A truck, you know, all hospital white and chromium. It has a musical gong, one of those arpeggio things, to apprise housewives of its arrival. Rather pretty, really, but Maxie's horse didn't like it. There was a lot of confusion that day. The fox went under the barbed wire fence round the new Electricity Board transformer station at Nether Sturry, hounds went after it and got into the switch-room and lost their heads. Two were electrocuted . . .'

'Poor darlings!' Cynthia said. Powel asked what next and Edward said, 'O, there was a power failure all over the district and none of the farmers could do their milking. There's nobody in these parts who can still do it by hand. The fox and some of the hounds came out on the far side of the transformer station. The fox seemed to be making for the Ardiham municipal sewage-farm. Maxie saw it and yelled *Gone Away!* and put his horse at a hawthorn hedge in his excitement. Unfortunately, what used to be pasture on the other side is now a forty-acre dump for old iron, one of Moynihan's ventures. The Moynihan who got four years in the Catholic

Co-operative Building Society swindle. Maxie came off into a pile of half-dismantled Churchill tanks . . .'

'*Hinc illae lacrimae.*' This from Carol, who had abandoned music for conversation and overheard the last sentence as he joined the group. Edward said, 'I always forget Americans are educated,' and Carol replied, 'I saw it in *Reader's Digest*.'

It was like that the whole evening; it gave Edward a headache. Presently he found himself with Powel in a group round the record-player with Hugh Carol, who had been head of N.A.E. in Bengal before he was given the British office. He had liked India and was a student of Zen Buddhism, kept open house for Indian visitors, and was, what Edward had often heard of but never met before, a Liberal. He was still sorting discs. Edward said, 'Hallo, can I help?'

'Last time you were at our place you said you had the *Miracle in the Gorbals* music.'

'It should be here somewhere.' Edward could not find the ballet-music Carol wanted. He put on an Armstrong disc. Off-sweet, the trumpet-call assailed their ears, sounding no charge, no retreat, only an ironical self-pity . . . poor me, poor me! Powel said, 'Sorry to leave that nigger on your hands.'

Edward turned his back on him and said to Hugh Carol, 'This ignorant bastard calls Indians niggers.'

'It's a chi-chi trick,' Hugh said, and to Powel, 'Have you any Indian blood?' Powel ignored him and said to Edward, 'How did it go? You've got Das in the bag?'

'I have not. I don't think we have a bag which would hold Das. There is an American tender, not to mention the Italian one.' Powel frowned and said to Carol, 'This man Das, Hugh . . . maybe you know him?'

Hugh was hardly listening; the trumpet called him. He nodded towards the record-player and said, 'This man Armstrong is the one I'm interested in. A subversive without saying a word. I wonder McCarthy hasn't had him on that shabby carpet of his. Just listen to the propaganda of defeat.' The trumpet shrieked, then began to mourn. Carol, replying belatedly to Powel, said, 'Das is a common name. You might as well ask me if I know Mr. Jones of Cardiff.'

'Sudhindra Nath Das,' Edward said.

'Oh. Certainly, I know him.'

'My impression,' Powel said, 'is that he can swing this thing. In theory he has to refer back to his committee, but in practice . . .'

He turned his handsome face, wearing the predatory mask, lower-lip out-thrust, full on Carol. Only at the temples was there any white hair, and that was contrived by his barber. 'In practice?' Carol prompted.

'It's not so much a question of what he'll take, but how he'd like it.'

'A bribe?'

'Yes. He's an Indian, after all.'

A small part of the distaste he felt showed in Carol's long, pale face. He ran his hand through untidy, prematurely white hair, which sprang up about his combing fingers. Powel mitigated his offence at once, saying, 'I mean, I know how to bribe an Englishman or a Yank, and any fool can bribe an Italian. But I don't know the form with wogs.'

'I never had occasion to bribe or be bribed by a wog,' Hugh said, 'but I imagine the form is the same as for your own people.'

Powel shrugged and looked sulky. Cynthia Carol came up behind him and said, 'Hide me from that guy Grenfell. I don't care to hear what Sartre said to him last Tuesday week.' Edward looked round nervously, but Grenfell was talking Italian to Benvenuta, Celia's pretty Calabrian maid. Carol and Edward moved away. Hugh said, 'How I hate your friend Powel.' 'I hardly like any of my friends,' Edward said, and, 'What will happen if he tries to bribe Sudhindra Das?'

'Das will accept the bribe.'

Edward was disconcerted and Hugh saw that and laughed and said, 'He is a very polite man, you see. He would not want to hurt anyone's feelings.'

'And we shall get the contract?'

'That will depend on whether your tender is the lowest, everything else being equal.'

'You mean Das won't stay bribed?'

'He will accept the bribe because he would feel it the height of ill-breeding to refuse it, and because he has a large and demanding family. But his loyalty to his government is absolute.'

Thinking of Powel if they lost the contract, Edward began to laugh. They moved to the drinks table to fill their glasses, where David and Canon Cromer were talking motor-cars. Edward left Carol with them, to collect dirty glasses. Grenfell was talking to Cynthia Carol and Powel. Edward heard him say, '. . . lives in Italy because he has to. If his father knew he was over here, there'd be

trouble.' They were talking about David Mendoza. Edward flushed. After David had been discharged by the medical board he had given in to his father and gone back to work for Mendoza & Co. Then there had been a series of minor scandals concerning youths in the factory and offices. Passing the gossipers on his way back with the glasses, Edward heard Grenfell saying, '. . . it was two years ago, at the time one of the tobacco companies—Imperial, was it, or Carreras?—were bidding for Mendoza's, one of them tried to blackmail him and when David told him to go to hell, this fellow went to the old man . . .' It was true. The old man wanted to break with his son then. David's mother interfered. It was arranged for David to have fifteen thousand a year from one of Mendoza's Italian companies provided he agreed to live abroad. They prosecuted the blackmailer: one of those 'Mr. A' cases, and Edward had thought the secret well kept. But Maxie Grenfell knew everything.

When Edward got back to the table Canon Cromer was saying, 'They tell me, Mendoza, you'll be driving a Ferrari for the rest of this season's racing.' 'They're the only cars that can give the Mercedes team a run for their money,' David said. Cromer accepted a sherry from Edward and said, 'I thought of using motor-racing as the theme of my Sunday piece, one week.' He wrote a column, a sort of sermon, every Sunday, for a Sunday paper. David said, 'Condemnatory, I fear, sir.'

'Why should you think so?'

Powel joined the bunch . . . they were eminently a bunch; it was the collective noun for them. He said, 'Someone get that man Grenfell out of my hair. He follows me about telling me how it was when he had a talk with de Gaulle at somewhere *les-deux-églises*.'

'Actually, there's only one church,' David said, and, to Cromer, 'Then you aren't against us, sir?'

'No. I shall argue, however, that you, like all of us, should be dedicated. The torero, before he enters the arena to fight the bull, hears mass.'

'You think God would accept my attempt to drive faster than the other chaps, as a sacrifice?'

'Why not?'

Edward did not hear any more. But later, when the guests were going home and David was cranking the Canon's ancient machine for him, they were still at it, for he saw the Canon lean out of the high window of his driving-seat and heard him say, 'It is simply a question of doing what we do with Him in our hearts. There are

no exceptions. In India there are men who steal for God's sake. Even the prostitute . . .'

Cynthia Carol, pulling her gloves on as she came out of the door behind Edward, said, 'Isn't it awful the way clergymen talk about religion nowadays?' David and Celia came out, David saying, 'Well, I shan't see you until the race. And then to the villa. I'm looking forward to having you there.' Cynthia said, 'Italy? How I envy you.' 'Yes, it'll be lovely,' Celia said, and went back into the house.

* * *

When they had all gone Edward lingered in the garden. A black-bird sang sweetly in the old apricot-tree; another answered from the great clump of rhododendrons on the bank behind the house. As the light failed the shell-pink water-lilies in the pond glowed like pale lanterns. He could still see the fish moving among the shimmering stems of these flowers, rising, diving, circling in the translucent water: it was like looking down on the choreographic flight of seagulls from the edge of a high cliff. Out in the garden he could pretend that Celia's resentment would have departed with their guests, although he knew that it had little to do with his being late. She came to the door, a column of pale light in the gloaming, and called to him, 'Don't you want any dinner?'

He went to her and followed her into the dining-room. Ham and salad, cheese, fruit and wine were set out on the round, highly polished table. For some minutes they ate in silence. Then, still looking at her plate, she said, 'Gough rang you.'

'Gough?' It was automatic, 'instinctive' as they say, to pretend not immediately to recognize who Gough was. Celia looked at him, then, without indulgence, and said, 'Gough. Messrs. Valentine Gough and Sons, Builders and Decorators, of Ardiham in this county.' This lapse into irony gave him time to compose an attitude. He said, 'Wanted money I suppose?'

'Why so tough?' she said. 'He's entitled to it, isn't he?'

'He can wait, can't he? He'll get it. We all have to wait nowadays. It's the penalty for living a generation ahead of the national income.'

'He has waited. And we're talking about Gough's bill, not lunatic national finance. We're also talking about my feelings: do you think I enjoy having to talk to creditors, in a rage at your welshing?'

'One creditor, singular,' Edward said, trying to lighten the atmosphere, 'one lone, lorn creditor.'

'Yes, you've managed to head the others off no doubt. Rather a'

pity, don't you think, that it had to be that particular one who found me in? Or perhaps it doesn't mean anything to you? I daresay you've forgotten what it was for.'

'Redoing your bedroom and sitting-room,' Edward said.

'My birthday present.'

'I'm sorry.'

'You always are. You're sorry, you know you're at fault, you admit it, oh so readily! . . .' She was beginning to talk excitedly, and when she did so in anger, a harsh, curiously masculine note invaded her voice. She said, 'Why don't you beat your breast and cry *mea culpa, mea culpa*? Then you'd feel at peace with yourself, you'd have done all you expect of yourself. Hasn't it ever occurred to you that being frank about your own weaknesses, admitting your own wrongdoing is a particularly contemptible kind of slyness?'

'You mean I'd do better to be hypocritical?' Edward said, glad that she seemed to have started a generalization. He should have known better, for she took it to herself and said, 'It'll get you nowhere to try abusing me. And anyway, at least hypocrisy requires an effort. Isn't it supposed to be a tribute to virtue? You pay it, too; there's no genuine candour in your confessions, they're super-hypocritical.'

It happened that Edward had been reading what he thought was the best modern novel he had yet found, Helen Eustis's *The Fool Killer*. And suddenly, as he sat silent under Celia's indictment, a phrase from it came into his mind . . . '*Even if you hadn't forgot nothing she was a woman could always remember something you should of forgot . . .*' And despite his accumulating wretchedness, manifest as a sourness in the stomach and a racing heart and a pressure behind the eyes, he suddenly laughed. Celia, who had been flushed, turned as white as her dress. She said, 'So you think it's funny. You . . .'

'It's nothing, I'm probably getting hysterical,' he interrupted her hastily, terrified that she would say something he could not absorb into his love for her, something that would lie between them and rot and stink. He went on, 'I *am* sorry, really. What happened was, I got caught when Ogilvie lost his argument with the Income Tax Commissioners and I had to find nine hundred at once.'

She said, 'I don't want to pry into your private financial arrangements. I am only too well aware that you prefer to keep them to yourself.'

'It isn't that, Celia, it's just that . . .'

'I've told you, I don't want to hear about it. But with the income you're supposed to be making—I say *supposed* because I have to guess what it is from the way we live—I should've thought we could pay our tax and our bills when they fall due.'

There was no reasonable answer to that; he got up and went into his own room. His hands were shaking and he felt sick. He found Gough's bill and came back into the dining-room with it and a cheque-book, and sat down again and wrote out the cheque, two hundred and nineteen pounds. He pushed his half-eaten plate of food away to make room. He gave Celia the bill and the cheque and said, 'Post it yourself, will you?' She looked at his plate and said, 'Aren't you going to finish that?'

'I don't want any more, really.'

'I've taken your appetite away, have I?'

'I wish you'd realize,' he said, 'that I'm not blaming you; that I defend myself instinctively, like a rat in a corner. It's you who are right. Quite right. But . . . yes, it's taken away my appetite, I can't help it, it has.'

That was the level they were down to, and had been for what seemed to him a very long time. Even by ordinary calendar reckoning, it was two years since Celia's mother had come slowly into his room one night, the room she alone called his 'den', and standing just inside the door, making that characteristic motion of the hand before the face, had said, humbly, apologetically, 'I've got to go, Edward, I mean leave here. I can't stand it.'

Her flat, sad finality had hurt his heart far more than any outburst of passionate anger could have done. All he could say was, 'Our quarrelling? I do my best to . . .' She did not let him finish. 'I'm not blaming you, or Celia,' she had interrupted, shaking her head at the chair he pushed towards her, standing there small and dried-up and old, saying she'd never been one to allot blame because you never knew, but that she was tired and—the limit, this, of her protest—'didn't feel up to it.' Meaning, by that, the nervous effort of living with her own daughter and son-in-law. She stuck to that, insisted that she would do very well in one of those homes run by professionals for old people. And all Edward could do to offset his shame and remorse was to ensure against his own money fecklessness by borrowing from the bank to pay the fees of her home five years in advance, a fantastically unbusinesslike thing to do, but all the relief he could afford himself. Celia and he had been visiting her mother in the pleasant village mansion where the home

was installed, ever since, but never, not once, together. At each visit Mrs. Woodreeve had withdrawn farther from them, or at least from him, so that he was sometimes inclined to be hurt by the decline, the failure of her interest in him, the drying up of her affection.

Celia rang the bell and asked for coffee. And speaking not angrily but in a sorrow Edward would not believe in but insisted to himself was designed to exasperate, she said that he must understand her position, that she did not know where they were, for all she knew nothing was ever paid for. And, at his gesture of impatience, 'But it's so! I don't know why you don't tell me things. If things aren't going well with us, why hide the fact? All I care about is to know. I'm perfectly willing to help. I'd go back to Fleet Street tomorrow.'

'It isn't like that. More than half what I get is in inventor's royalties, which means that . . .'

'That we live on borrowed money. But why live so high, then?'

'Advanced, not borrowed.'

'For Christ's sake, don't quibble,' she shouted, in a sudden gust of rage.

'It's not really a quibble. To me it seems that you're making a tragic mountain out of a commonplace molehill.' Edward knew, of course, that this was not so; that she had not been talking merely about money any more than he had; that there was something else, important, behind her discontent and his defensiveness and evasiveness. She came out with something of the kind after the silence they had kept while Benvenuta served the coffee. 'It's the way we live. Floundering about.'

Edward had a vision of a fish flapping and gaping on wet sand. But this getting near to the bone instead of scratching the skin broke his control. He was suddenly hysterically angry, not because she was wrong but because she was right. Floundering. Casting wildly about and not knowing that there was no help. Grabbing at this and that—an evening with the boys—Powel, God help him, was a 'boy' if ever there was one. And buying things, surrounding oneself with a barrier of enamelled and chromium-plated machinery. Above all, those two surreptitious visits to Eileen in time ostensibly given to his aunt in her trouble, the first just before Walter Tillotson was certified as insane, the second after he had been taken away, crying in a loud and toneless voice that it was a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Edward had, on both occasions, spent two hours of the whole day he was supposed to be dedicating

to 'cheering up poor Aunt Sarah'. It was the unhappy sense of being useless, of no comfort to her, which at first had driven him to leave her—'We're frantically busy, you know, and there doesn't seem to be anything I can do. Let me know at once if you need money.' He had found himself in Ashersham with an empty afternoon on his hands. Halloband's clerk had given him Eileen's address. She was living in a cottage near a place called Bowden's Farm on the outskirts of Knutsden, sharing it with the childless wife of a tractor-driver who had emigrated to Canada and was supposed to send for her as soon as he was settled in a job. Both women worked in the fields and orchards, making good money. Eileen, Edward told himself, would be out at work; Arthur at school. But it would be interesting to see where she lived, to be able to picture her circumstances. When he drove up to the place, a cottage very like the one she had been born in, built of red brick in the late eighteenth century, the other woman was out at work, Arthur was at school; but Eileen was there, sitting on a chair outside the back door in the sunshine, perfectly still, doing nothing but look and listen. It crossed Edward's mind as he got out of the car and she rose and came to meet him, her expression one of surprise rather than pleasure, that he knew nobody else who could do that, could be still.

All they did was sit and talk in the sun; or rather, Edward talked and Eileen listened. Her body had broadened and thickened and her hands, held still and open on her knees, were etched with lines of ineradicable dirt, the nails worn to the quick, the skin so rough that the roughness could be seen as a texture. These hands had a strong and exciting power over Edward. He seemed to feel their roughness on the skin of his naked body, the idea was more exciting than if Eileen's hands had been smooth and manicured. His own unexpected, unsuspected, perversity surprised him. His eyes, as he talked, went from her hands to her face: that had not changed. Protected from weathering by the conventional cosmetics, it had been protected from thickening and coarsening like her body by the still lively wanton spirit which, Edward had always supposed, she had from her gipsy mother, that dark, angry, and lawless woman who, inexplicably, had married Figgis, although she was actively contemptuous of, as Aunt Sarah put it, people living proper, in houses.

Driving away from the cottage, it began to seem to Edward that what he had gone there for was admiration for having made himself a place on the fringe of the world belonging to the rich and mighty. There, in the road, had stood, gleaming in the sun, his two-thousand-

pound motor-car; there, well fitted to his body, setting off his unimpaired beauty, was his thirty-guinea suit, his three-guinea shirt, his seven-guinea shoes. His self, that interfering and deceitful entity, insisted that no, he had gone to Eileen to make sure that she was all right and to receive the comfort of her animal stillness, the sort of comfort you can get, in a lesser degree, from watching a cat relax. After all, he had received no word of praise or admiration for his achievements, nothing more than a 'You done all right for yerself, Ted' which was almost contemptuous, yet he was not dissatisfied, was he? Did not feel that he had not got what he went for, did he?

It was neither the challenging mockery of Eileen's expression—a singularity probably as much due to the way her eyes were set in her head as to any feeling or idea as sophisticated as it seemed to express—nor even the curious attractiveness of her spoilt hands, which drove Edward to start making love to her on his second visit, and sent them at last, after the passage of years which seemed more numerous than they really were, to bed together. It was the circumstance that, when he arrived, on an afternoon when he now knew that he would find her but neither her friend nor her son in the house, she was taking a cake out of the oven and the cottage kitchen was full of its smell. For a moment, Edward was badly put out: it was the smell of Figgis's violent death. But it was also the smell of what had gone before that, and had never been finished and he had since been paying for.

* * *

Edward's noisy anger, then, was as much due to his knowledge that Celia was righter than she knew, as to any other cause. When, cryptically, Celia said, 'The trouble is neither of us have anything to do, really,' he worked himself into a rage such that he could take what she said as personal criticism. So he had nothing to do, eh? He didn't know how many more hours a week she expected him to work . . . Out it came, the vomit of self-pitiful commonplaces, vulgar, base and noisy, as if by clamour he could make himself believe that he was a martyr to hard labour in the service of—but of what? House maintenance, perhaps; of the smooth running of the car and some other ingenious pieces of ironmongery. Or Celia's comfort, Celia's standing among the other wives in the other mellow brick houses, the other gardens of delphiniums and lupins. But what comfort did she get from him? She listened to him, her face hardening, thinning, freezing; and when he moved to the door

and turned to spew out some final 'point' she said, 'You sound exactly like a candidate for Moral Re-armament.'

'You ill-tempered bitch!' he yelled at her. She ignored that and went on, 'And if you really don't know what I meant, if all this is anything more than screaming because it hurts, I made a bigger bloody mistake than I'd've thought possible.'

* * *

He went to his sitting-room. Celia, or Benvenuta, had put the afternoon's mail on his desk. For a long time he sat and stared at it, his stomach sour with contrived self-righteousness, his mind hot and clouded. When he started to feel ashamed he began to open letters by way of distraction. Bank-statement, with the figures in red and a little higher than he had expected; bills and receipts; a letter from a man who said he had invented an adaptation to television sets which made it possible to broadcast and receive smells. He wanted a thousand pounds for it, by return. There was a letter marked Private and Confidential which Edward left until the last. As he opened it he noticed that his hands were shaking, and he stopped moving and stared at them as if they were not his, but still interesting. He read the letter slowly, dully, not taking it in until he made a deliberate effort, going back to the start.

Dear Sir,

Figgis and yourself.

Our client, Miss Eileen Figgis, has instructed us to write to you in the matter of the maintenance arrangement [there followed a reference to the titles and dates of the documents in the case and the] The business she wishes us to discuss with you could better be dealt with in the course of a personal meeting than by letter. May I call to see you at your solicitor's office in London? Or would you prefer the meeting to take place at this address?

Yours faithfully,

Ivo Halloband.

Edward had an impulse to ignore this letter; or to send a postcard saying that he regarded all business between Halloband's client and himself, barring the standing banker's order, as at an end. Halloband's letter could mean only one thing: that Eileen had decided that his renewed interest in her was worth money. That, and not that he was a great man, was what the shining car, the thirty-guinea suit, had told her. But Edward's reluctance to break off all contact with Eileen was stronger than his self's resentment; it was

like an instinct, an intuition that one day he would need her for some purpose; it was like the reluctance to throw away the chance of some excitement envisaged as pleasant. He took letter paper from a drawer and wrote this:

Dear Mr. Halloband,

I cannot think of any business between Miss Figgis and myself which would justify me in asking you to come to London, or me in going to Ashersham at a time when I am particularly busy. Could you indicate the nature of the business in a letter addressed to me at my office and marked personal ?

He re-read this letter and it offended him; it represented nothing but one of the half-dozen attitudes he might strike; it was a kind of lie, as every public act is a lie. He put it into an envelope, addressed and stamped it.

2

SUDHINDRA NATH DAS was with Powel. Edward hesitated at the door and Powel said, 'Yes, come in, Tillotson.' That use of his surname, instead of the customary 'Ed', as a derogation, was clumsy. Had not Das been left in Edward's hands yesterday? It was bad policy to run down his standing. He said, suddenly breezy, 'Morning, 'Zeke. Morning, Mr. Das.' And to Powel, 'You're early this morning.'

'Fortunately,' Powel said, 'someone in this outfit works.' Das gave his high, tittering laugh. He said, 'Oh, Mr. Tillotson, we have been discussing India's need for foreign capital. A most interesting subject.'

'And the foreign capitalist's need of India,' Powel said. 'Don't let us forget that side of it.'

'Heaven forbid!' Edward said. Powel glared at him. Mr. Das took off his glasses, and with them the keen brightness of his eyes. Powel said, 'Take the case of Mr. Das's wife's cousin . . .'

'A member of our lower House,' Das put in, and murmured a name; and Powel, nodding, touching the synthetic silver at his temples, said, 'Quite so. Well, there he is, with an excellent plan for pay-as-you-look television, supported by some advertising revenue, in Bengal. Nothing but shortage of capital prevents him from starting tomorrow . . .'

'It was a digression,' Das murmured, 'just a case in point, nothing to do with our business here . . .'

'Nothing at all,' Edward said. 'And, coming to that business, here are the supplementary figures you asked me for.' Miss Gresham, his secretary, had put the papers into his hand as he left his office. Powel's reason for telling him about what Das called the 'digression' was, retrospectively, to put Hugh Carol in his place: he never liked the men whom Edward openly admired. And perhaps he wanted to humiliate Das. And there was also his concern to demonstrate that everyone, without exception, was on the make.

'I was considering,' Powel said, ignoring Edward's attempt to sweep past the case of Mr. Das's wife's cousin, 'whether we shouldn't help ourselves to a new customer, an export customer at that, by persuading Mr. Das to let us help with some capital.'

It was ten minutes before they got back to the subject of the Indian government contract. When, half an hour later, Das left them, Powel, with his eyes on the estimate worksheet they had based their tenders on, said that they had plenty of margin. 'Twenty thousand should satisfy the enterprising Babu. It's in the bag.'

He might, Edward thought, be right. He had never known anything about the business side of their work. He knew that he was on the Board because it was useful for Powel to be able to say, 'Mr. Tillotson is our technical director: he will answer all your technical questions.' In practice, Edward mouthed the answers, Mr. Chase, in charge of research, provided them. Edward was a part of the firm's public relations. He knew it. From time to time he became faintly uneasy, when it seemed to him that their administration, advertising, public relations, accounts, even their profits, had grown like a cancer out of all proportion to the body they lived on, their actual manufacturing. But Powel knew best; and, if he did not, there was old Mr. Evans, a remote but prophetic figure, down in Wales. So, to his satisfied claim, Edward said only, 'Is it?'

But the question was by way of introduction to what, for a moment, Edward decided that he ought to tell Powel: that twenty thousand pounds would not keep Sudhindra Nath Das in Powel's bag. Then Edward hesitated, brought up against the grey boredom of his own indifference. 'I daresay you're right,' he said, and left him. Miss Gresham followed Edward into his office and he asked her if he had anything else to do. Nothing. Nothing he could not pretend could wait, anyway. He told her he would spend the rest of the day in the laboratory. That was above their warehouse in Clerkenwell.

He drove there. His own corner of the laboratory was screened from the big, open laboratory where their technical men worked, by hardboard walls. The Voice-Fabricator was set up on a bench under a window which overlooked the workshops of a cork-importer; sometimes Edward sat idly watching raw cork being unloaded in his yard.

He sat on his high stool and fiddled with the trace-pencil of the apparatus—a short beam of light 10 microns in diameter. Then he shifted the stool and did half an hour's steady work on the calculations—his papers were always left in place, just as he had finished work, so that he could resume when he wanted to. Chase, who was in charge of the firm's big-screer project, lounged in at the end of that half-hour; he at once begun an instalment of his half-serious nagging about the V-Fab. being a wicked waste of time. Edward said he knew it was; he said, 'Being, like most scientists, illiterate, you won't know that a Frenchman named Pascal, who started all this, said that the physical sciences were all right as a hobby, but should on no account be taken seriously.'

'Pascal? I thought he was a sort of religious maniac?'

Chase played up like that; in point of fact he was a widely read man; his reading had destroyed his confidence in his science, or his talent would have carried him much higher than a fifteen hundred a year research job with Llewellyn and Powel. Edward went on, 'If I perfect this thing, I can't think of any possible use for it, unless the B.B.C. want a repertory company of synthetic opera-singing voices.' Chase, who took the other side whenever Edward refused to defend himself, stroked his Japanese-warrior moustache and said that this was a good idea, 'F'rinstance no more trouble with Equity.'

'Oh, I imagine the T.U.C. would insist on the machines becoming members. Now go away and let me get on with this.'

'Is it true there's going to be another strike at the works?'

'Not that I know of,' Edward said. 'I was there Wednesday. The degree of bloody-mindedness seems to be about average.'

'Some of the tradesmen get more than I do,' Chase said, 'and if you ask me that's half the trouble. Look at it this way . . .'

'Look,' Edward said, 'I know all about it. It's terrible, all those working men having enough to eat and a roof over their heads, and fridges in the kitchen. Shocking! Now get to hell out of here, there's a good chap, and tell someone else about it.'

Chase looked at him speculatively, scratching delicately in his

moustache. He said, 'I never did get you. If you weren't a director of this three-ring circus, I'd say you were what they call a subversive.'

'A saboteur,' Edward said. 'And now, f—— off, will you?'

'That reminds me,' Chase said, laughing, 'there was this vicar walking along a street in his parish, and he sees this chap chasing the birds off the seeds in his front garden, and yelling at them . . .'

'I heard it when I was twelve,' Edward said. Chase said, 'In that case, next time you want me to f—— off, just say Shoo, shoo!' For another half hour Edward sat at his desk, looking up logarithms—he never used a slide-rule, this was a sport, not work—and converting sine values to capacity \times resistance \times inductance values. Then he left the building. Chase, on his way to lunch, caught up with him on the stairs, and before he could start anything Edward said, coldly and curtly, that he would be calling for a progress report on the big-screen project within ten days. But that was a line he was increasingly incapable of taking: he was no longer even a bit like the centurion in the Gospels; he might say, *Come!* but what Chase said was, 'Nark it, Tillotson.'

At the foot of the stairs an old woman in a threadbare black coat, a ridiculous hat and cotton gloves stood peering nervously about. To Chase, for he was taller than Edward, his moustache looked important and his clothes, having cost much less than Edward's, naturally looked as if they had cost much more, she said, 'Oh, sir, if you please . . .'

'All inquiries on the first floor,' Chase said.

Edward looked at her and she reminded him so much of Celia's mother that his eyes went to her hands: no arthritis, but she was carrying a letter. He said, 'Can I help?'

'It's about Daniel Blagdon, sir.'

'What about him, Mrs. . . . ?'

'I'm his mother, sir. There's this certificate . . .'

Edward took the letter from her and read it. He said, 'I see,' and the old woman began to talk volubly, confusedly, saying that Danny's father and grandfather before him had had the same leg-ulcers. 'Father to son, that's how it goes, never a generation missed. Well, they say the sins of the fathers'll be visited on the children, and in a manner of speaking . . .'

'Never mind, ulcers aren't sins, Mrs. Blagdon,' Edward said, and, 'Don't you worry, he must have his month in bed if the doctor says so. What's the National Insurance worth?'

'Fifty shillings a week sir, and how they expect anybody to manage on that, and considering the price of the stamp, week after week, month in month out . . .'

'Fifty shillings won't go far, certainly. It's that which is worrying you?'

'I wouldn't ask anything, sir, only there was this man come about the instalment on Danny's car, and what with the TV payments and Danny's father's shingles, well, I . . .'

'You can take it that the firm will make up Danny's pay at least for four weeks. Is that all right?'

Walking away from her after standing to be thanked, Chase said, 'Nine quid a week plus overtime at eighteen, and he buys a car. I bet you feel grand, Tillotson. All glorious within, like the king's daughter.'

'You'd lose your bet,' Edward said, and did not offer him a lift.

At the Kingsway-Southampton Row crossing, chaos was come again. Edward sat there in the throb and stench, beholding himself doing good works and disliking what he saw. It was intolerable to be him before whom the Mrs. Blagdons walked humbly and held out a diffident hand. But intolerable, too, to be Daniel Blagdon. The policeman gave up trying to obstruct the traffic and he got as far as Tottenham Court Road without being actually immobilized again. Even at that check he had no time to carry his discontent a further stage before the traffic broke up again and he was cutting up a blasphemous taxi-driver so as to get across before the lights changed. He ate a solitary lunch at *Flaubert's*. With wine, it cost him two pounds. He folded the bill into his wallet, to be sent to his tax-accountant. He realized he had eaten too much. He had not really wanted any lunch. He went back to the office. Miss Gresham followed him into his room and said, 'There's a Mr. Halloband waiting to see you.'

'I can't see him,' Edward said automatically; and, double-taking, 'Halloband? I only posted a letter to him this morning. He can't have had it.'

'He says he's in London on other business and called on the off-chance. He says he's very comfortable in our waiting-room, thank you, and has no other appointment until three.'

'Very well, I'll see him.'

'Mrs. Tillotson phoned.'

'Get her for me, first.'

Edward waited for Celia's voice with a heavily beating heart:

indigestion, or the anxiety with which she inspired him, as if she had taken over his conscience. He heard the PBX girl say, 'Mr. Tillotson for you, Mrs. Tillotson. I'm putting you through.'

'I've heard from O'Dwyer,' she said, without preamble, 'he's made an appointment for us to see Professor de Perry in Paris.'

'When?'

Celia told him and he looked at the desk-calendar and said, 'It fits. I mean, we could do it on our way to Italy. I assume that you do want to see this de Perry . . .'

'Why do you ask me that?' Her voice, thinned by the telephone, was peevish. 'You know dam' well we want to try everything. O'Dwyer says de Perry knows more about sterility than any other doctor in the world.'

'I just wanted to be sure. After the last time . . .'

'That swine.'

'Quite. All right, I'll tell Miss Gresham to confirm it.'

Edward rang off and sat looking at the phone, thinking that he knew nothing of what went on in Celia's mind. There were times when he thought her glad enough to be childless, and wondered whether her search for effective medical help was just doing what she conceived of as some kind of duty. But beneath her apparent and perhaps real relief might be a corrosive resentment, an accusation she was forced to repress because it was not 'reasonable' and they were all intellectuals now if only because there was nothing else to be. All Edward was sure of was that he knew and could know nothing about it, about her. Miss Gresham's voice said, 'Mr. Halloband,' and he, Halloband, began talking at once, bustling forward, half-dragging Edward to his feet with a hearty handshake, explaining in elaborate detail how it was that he followed so close upon the heels of his letter . . . 'A bad metaphor, that, Mr. Tillotson, for I never 'eard that letters 'ad 'eels.'

'I wrote last night,' Edward said, 'but you'll not have had my letter yet.'

The office could not compete with Halloband; he had too many dimensions for it, it was all surfaces and he all volumes. That made Edward's movements cautious, as if he were afraid of putting hand or foot through paper. 'In my letter,' he said, 'I told you I knew of no business we could have to discuss. Not that I'm not pleased to see you.'

Halloband had taken an upright chair; his body concealed it completely. He put his big, square hands on his striped trouser

knees and inclined his massive body towards Edward; the black cloth of his curious hybrid coat folded into statuesque creases.

'Supposin',' he said, 'I was to put me cards on the table?'

'It might be as well, Mr. Halloband.'

'Very well, sir. I'm not here as me client's legal adviser. I'm 'ere as a friend usin' his good offices.' The lawyer sat back, frowned, and added, 'That boy of 'ers has f'iled 'is eleven-plus.'

'I'm sorry to hear that.'

'You know what it means. No grammar school. Second'ry modern. She has 'er pride, sir. Wants a future for the boy. The fact is, Mr. Tillotson, me client needs 'elp.'

'I've been helping her, as an act of grace, for—well, you know best how long,' Edward said, but without conviction, knowing that the price of those two visits was now to pay, and of any others in the future.

'I know it, sir, I know it. I've nothing to urge, barrin' this—here's your chance to do a bit more.'

'An odd way to put it, Mr. Halloband.'

'*Works*, Mr. Tillotson, *works*. I don't forget a conversation we 'ad touchin' Mr. Walter Tillotson's wrong-'eadedness.'

Edward studied him with open curiosity; he had not aged nor changed. His intuition was astoundingly sure. Because Edward knew his self guilty, born and raised guilty, he could no more have rejected this chance than he could have rejected a fortune; or absolution with a certificate of authenticity. What he said then had no bearing on what he felt: 'The trouble is, the more I do, the more I must seem to commit myself.'

'You have 'er affidavit,' Halloband said.

'Don't my acts repudiate it? To anyone less perspicacious than yourself, Mr. Halloband, it would look as if I had forced Miss Figgis to sign that in return for helping her, as if I were fulfilling an obligation in return for her admission that no such obligation exists.'

Halloband had bowed to Edward's description of him as perspicacious. But he waved and grimaced away the argument, saying, 'Come, Mr. Tillotson, you're talking like a damned, pettifogging attorney . . .' He chuckled at his little joke and, leaning still further towards Edward, 'Didn't we agree' . . . it sounded like *agrye-ee*, 'that we weren't talking on that level?'

'What do you suggest I should do?'

Halloband looked slowly and deliberately about the office, taking in everything, as if estimating what it had cost. Not that he was

really doing that, Edward was convinced that the lawyer was very well informed of his position. That appraisal was only a demonstration of Halloband's line of thought. He said, 'An extra five sovereigns a week would make all the difference.'

Edward did not pretend to hesitate but nodded and took letter paper from a drawer and wrote an order to his bank and got up to hand it to Mr. Halloband. He read it and gave it back saying, 'I expected no less.'

'More, perhaps?'

Halloband raised a hand: 'Measure, sir, measure in all things.' Edward smiled and rose and said, 'They serve a very tolerable glass of Madeira at the wine-bar in Pie Street. May I offer you a glass?'

'That's kind,' Halloband said.

* * *

The two hundred and fifty a year Edward had fined his self helped for a while, say for as long as it took him to work the TL.4 through the traffic and out on to the arterial road. But, like spirits, its effect decayed with time and left a hangover. By the time he was ten minutes from home his guilt lay upon him again, heavy as a rain-drenched overcoat. As Edward went into the hall, Celia was coming downstairs, as if the scene had been planned by a playwright. She was wearing a suit and a hat and carrying a small case, and her face was white, strained, a paper mask of stylized resentment. She said, 'Has Vinson gone?'

'Yes. He just passed me.'

'How tiresome. I wanted him to carry something downstairs for me.'

'Can't I do it, whatever it is?'

'Thank you. I am sorry to bother you with it, but it is too heavy for me. I am afraid I shall have to put you to even more trouble. I want the car to drive to the station. As I am catching a train, I shall have to leave it there. It means that you will have to walk down for it.' She offered no explanation of her cold rage, and proposed departure: she was assuming that he knew what it was about. He did not. Yet it would not be true to say that he 'had no idea'. It was a question of wondering what she had found out.

The situation was so ridiculous that he was as much embarrassed as distressed by it. He was in the ludicrous position of having ritually to ask questions to all of which he knew the answers, so that all his expressions, inflexions and gestures would be as false as an actor's.

But there it was, he had to show surprise, indignation, pain; had to lie, plead, explain, and all simply for the record, simply to arrive, officially as it were, where he already was. A grey pall of boredom, a duller and more universal and in some ways less tolerable pain than the sharp one of his distress and Celia's bitter anger, settled, like some nauseating and quite ineffectual anaesthetic, over his mind. Celia had put down her suitcase and was pretending to adjust her hat in the old Eagle looking-glass on the wall. Making a great effort to rid his voice of weariness, Edward said, 'What's all this about?'

'You know dam' well what it's about,' Celia said, without turning round, 'Is there any point in talking about it?'

'There certainly is,' he said. The invisible stage manager ought to have stopped him there and made him do it again. (*Look, you're in great agony of mind, see? You're fighting for your love, see? And you sound like you were saying there's time to catch the bus if we hurry. Put some feeling into it, for God's sake!*) But words, he thought, will no longer hold feeling; it runs through their worn fabric and leaves them flaccid. Yet, since there was no other means of expression, since he was not dead, since not being dead consists in forcing yourself, moment by moment, to believe that something can be done about things, he went on, 'I'd like an explanation.'

To his astonishment, an astonishment which almost expressed itself in hysterical laughter, she said, 'If you want to keep letters a secret, you should tear them up before you throw them down the lavatory pan, or burn them.'

'What letters?'

'Oh, for God's sake! And don't think I snoop into your business. It's you all over—not thinking it might stop up the pipe. I had to fish it out. So I read it.'

For the life of him he could not keep the grin off his face. Celia stamped furiously. 'It isn't funny, you swine! Who is this woman you're keeping? Not that it matters——'

Halloband's letter, of course. Edward said, 'Eileen Figgis. You know perfectly well who she is. The girl whose father I killed.'

'Don't dramatize. You didn't kill him, he fell over and broke his neck.'

'I'm not *keeping* her, as you put it. I contribute to her support. Look, Celia, I've never told you because I didn't know what you'd say. It was something I had to do. Say there's no sense in it if you like, but I've always felt I owed her——'

'That's rubbish, and I don't believe it.'

'I know. You don't understand. I'm not one of the righteous, like you.'

'What do you mean by that?'

Edward shrugged. Celia said, 'I've suspected something like this for a long time. Well, I've had enough. I shall see a solicitor and——'

'So you've been judging me in a kind of mean silence,' Edward, suddenly angry in his turn, shouted at her, 'instead of telling me, asking me——'

'Silent,' she interrupted, 'yes, I was silent. Because one can't talk to you, Edward. There isn't anyone there. You . . . oh, what's the use? Will you please get my trunk down?'

'No, I bloody well won't. This is all bloody silly. We're going to stop it. Now. We're going . . .'

He was just making a noise. She shouted at him, then, 'Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!' But *her* noise did not convince him either. Her freedom could not be worth so much to her if a trunk full of clothes stood between it and her. She turned and ran up the stairs. In a moment he heard her small cabin-trunk dragging and bumping over his head. She reappeared at the top of the stairs, hauling the thing, he would not help her. He was not clear why he was sullenly determined to stop her going away. He wanted her to go away, so that he could be quiet, so that he could be free, answerable to nobody. Celia, in the passionate strength of rage, pushed the trunk over the edge of the top stair and tipped it. Her face was distorted, a mask of suffering fury. The trunk began to slide. It came crashing down, gaining enough momentum to up-end itself and turn one complete somersault, smashing a banister and gouging a large piece of plaster out of the wall. It came to rest in the middle of the hall, intact, upside-down. Edward sat on it.

'Oh, for Christ's sake, don't be so childish,' she said, coming down after it. 'Get up and let me get out of this bloody house.' He stood up. She got hold of the trunk by a handle and began to pull it. He put his foot on it. She gave up tugging and stood straight and said, 'You lie and cheat and wangle, you . . . oh, I suppose I should've known, it's in the blood, you're nothing, after all, but a dirty little Jew swindler . . .'

She was yelling now, white-faced; her face was enormous, it filled the whole hall, the hole in the middle opening and shutting, opening and shutting. Edward was red and hot inside. Of its own volition his right arm swung, his right hand struck her, hard, on the side of the head. She staggered sideways, putting her hand to her face, silent, all eyes, the eyes glittering, astonished and

mad. Her mouth opened to speak, the Benvenuta's voice, behind them, said, '*Scusi, signora, de butch . . . che vuole la signora per domenica?*'

'Beef,' Edward said, waving her to go away, 'Beef. The usual joint.' She departed, muttering *Biff, biff*, and a gloss in Italian. Celia sat down on the trunk and began to cry.

'Good Christ,' Edward said, 'all you've got to do is go and see the lawyer, this Ivo Halloband. He'll tell you, if you don't believe me. Celia, please, please don't go away. Don't do anything. We're going away together . . . wait a bit anyway . . .'

He went on talking. She went on crying with her face in her hands and her elbows on her knees.

3

SHE had believed him readily enough in the end; Edward was still dwelling on this as he signed the letters Miss Gresham had brought him. The feeling in his heart—but it was in the solar plexus and the loins, he reflected, that he was aware of it, not the heart—was pity. He perceived, and wished that he had not, that she, Celia, was obliged to believe him; for, if she did not, then he had a son; he was not sterile; she was barren. Intolerable conclusion.

He turned over the last page of the letter folder. 'What's this?' he said, picking up not a letter for signature but a sealed envelope addressed to him in Powel's handwriting. Miss Gresham said, 'Mr. Powel left it for you before he went to Machynlleth. Mr. Tillotson, I wanted to ask you——'

'Well?'

'You going away tomorrow, I was wondering if I could have the day off. Gordon's got two days' leave. They don't get much, being so short-handed. It's a chance for us.'

Edward looked up at her, at the impeccable cosmetic mask, the neat blouse, the pretty gold and enamel brooch which had been her grandmother's—'Victorian, you see, Mr. Tillotson, and very smart now.' He said, 'I read in the *Telegraph* that they're over a thousand short of establishment. A policeman's life is not a happy one, eh?'

'Pardon?'

'A quotation. The pop music of yesteryear. I suppose there's one:

advantage of their being so short-handed. Quicker promotion for your Gordon. How's he getting on?'

'Detective-Sergeant, now, Mr. Tillotson.'

'I suppose we'll be losing you to him soon?'

Miss Gresham smiled primly. Edward said, 'Take the day off by all means. Tell the Secretary I said so. No, I'll tell him myself.'

'Mr. Belsey's off with 'flu, Mr. Tillotson.'

'I'll leave a note for him, then.'

Edward opened Powel's letter. It contained a hand-written note and a cheque drawn in favour of a company he had never heard of for twenty thousand pounds. Powel's note said, *Came to terms with Das. A three-quarters of a million contract being news, I have told publicity to release it to the Press. Belsey being away, I could not get a second signature on the enclosed. It is for Das's (mythical?) brother-in-law. Sign it and have it posted, will you? Happy holiday.*

Frankly curious, Miss Gresham was staring. Edward looked at her and she looked away. He signed the cheque, frowning, and said, 'Send this to Mr. Das, with our compliments. He knows all about it.'

'I bet he does!' she said. That was not like her. Edward looked at her and said, 'We are investing in the Pay-as-you-look Television Company of Bengal, Miss Gresham.'

'Yes, Mr. Tillotson.'

If, he reflected, the girl sometimes stepped out of line, it was his fault. The case of Chase, at the lab, all over again. They did not take him seriously. Why should they? He did not take himself seriously, either. Not in this role. He heard Celia saying, 'There's nobody there.' He knew what she meant: an isolated self had no reality but for the host it lived on. Even your friends couldn't know it, any more than they could know you had a tapeworm if you didn't tell them.

'O.K.,' he said, 'that's all. I'm going now. Got to pack.'

* * *

'Why on earth,' Celia said, 'do we always have to get to railway stations and airports hours ahead of time?'

She was wearing a linen suit the colour of a grey pearl, and none of her rings, and carried grey kid gloves: the thin distinction of her head looked like an insult to their surroundings. One might almost have suspected a specific difference between her and the other passengers. Edward said, 'The A.A. man said that if we got here early they might put us on the earlier plane, the one we asked for in the first place. I told you that.'

'If we could not get on the first plane, we might just as well have gone by sea in the first place.'

'You said you were willing to go by air if it meant an earlier start from the other side.'

'You know I loathe being shut up in one of these horrible tin boxes.'

The airport lounge had a curious smell of hot diesel oil and burnt chocolate: it kept Edward just on the point of being sick. The A.A. man, tall and fair and with conscientiously laughing eyes and his cap at a dashing angle, crossed to their table, walking like a man who feels himself the cynosure, whatever that is, of all eyes. He bawled, making himself heard above the clamour of aircraft engines being run-up beyond the huge plate-glass window commanding the runway.

'Sorry, sir. No joy. Have to be the eleven-fifty.'

Edward nodded and put half a crown into his hand. The A.A. man saluted Celia with the smile of a man who has used the right after-shave lotion. He walked, or rather strode boldly, away from them. Celia watched him without indulgence; she said, 'Look at him acting like one of the drivers.'

'They call them pilots,' Edward said.

'Do they? I call them drivers. A pilot is a man who steers a ship into and out of harbours.' Coffee had been slopped on the Formica table-top. With a matchstick Edward drew a face. Celia said, 'Come, come!' He dropped the matchstick and began hating the stout man at the next table. He was wearing a canary yellow nylon sports shirt with the open collar turned down over a purple jacket of excessively hairy pseudo-tweed, was reading the *Daily Mirror* and picking his nose. His wife was fatter than he was; her jeans fitted very snugly; the flesh of her blunt feet bulged between the straps of her sandals. Grey showed at the roots of her bleached hair. She sucked Coca-Cola through a blue straw. A rather listless little boy with the grey face of a famine victim was eating a bright green ice with an air of suffering.

The loud-speakers made a clanging noise: a standard English voice invited four couples to go to the flight-exit. Tillotson was one of the names called. Their travelling companions included an intellectual-looking Negro whose face was elaborately decorated with purplish ritual scars; his pale and ferrety-looking wife was far gone in an enormous pregnancy, the substance of hands and face drained into her belly so that they were skeletal. They stood where they were

told by a two-dimensional young woman cleverly drawn to advertise the airline. She took papers from them and gave them other papers with the sharp, smiling assurance of a card-sharper.

They could see the aeroplane on the runway. Celia said, 'There goes your car.' Your; not our. A mechanic drove the dark blue TL.4 up the ramp and into the aircraft. Presently they followed the implacably smiling girl in uniform out on to the concrete; an icy wind snarled round their ankles and snatched at their throats. Over the Channel the sun came out: packed in the tiny cabin they could just catch a glimpse of its gleam off the sea and, like prisoners peering at the sky through the grating of a cell window, they craned to catch sight of the waves. Celia was pale. Crossing the French coast after a quarter of an hour, the aircraft bumped and soared. Edward felt the grinding din of engines in his teeth, like a dentist's drill. It was too noisy to talk. They smiled thinly at each other. The sun shone on France but as they walked into the airport buildings the wind was as keen as ever.

They were away from the airport in ten minutes. Going inland the wind dropped and it was warmer. Edward drove slowly. He said, 'I was quite sorry to leave the roses. They're lovely this year.'

'The front bed on the lawn's full of bindweed,' Celia said.

'Vinson's so busy with the fruit-trees.'

'He could find ten minutes to do that job, surely?'

'It's a big garden for one man.'

'Nonsense, he's bone lazy.'

'Well, I'll tell him.'

'I ticked him off about it yesterday,' Celia said.

'I wish you wouldn't,' Edward said.

'Why the devil shouldn't I?'

'You dislike him, and it shows. It sounds in your voice. He's human, too, Celia. He resents it.'

'He's an oaf and he's dishonest and he's malicious.'

As if the bitterness which her criticism, and the memory of her abuse, had brought up into his mouth could be sweetened by speed, Edward began to drive faster. At least that imposed silence: there would be no more words to turn the bad taste into a physical obstruction, like a lump of sour fat trying to force its way out between his teeth. They lunched at Abbeville in silence. All he said was, 'A nice wine'; and Celia, 'It's all right.' She never would quite play the game of pretending that what they bought was always worth the money.

Through Beauvais, Pontoise and into Paris Edward kept the car at fifty. In the city he was nervous and twice lost his way and Celia put him right. When they found the hotel Celia sat for a moment in the car and looked at it and said, 'Oh God, it's one of those concrete boxes.'

'Well, I'm sorry, but you wouldn't stay at the place David suggested.'

'It would have been full of queers.'

'I'm beginning to wish we hadn't accepted his invitation,' Edward said. 'When we get to the villa that's apt to be full of queers too.'

She was right about the hotel: there were two beds, and an air-conditioner, and a wireless set and two kinds of telephone and iced-water, but no space. The air smelt of cheap soap. In the bathroom there was a paper seal fixed over the lavatory seat to prove that it was clean. Celia called Edward to inspect this phenomenon. 'Untouched by human arse,' she said, and, 'They ought to put it in the adverts. Grand Hotel Foster Dulles—*son confort, sa cave, sa cuisine, ses WC.*'

They got a bit drunk at dinner, but it was not a good idea because, sober, Celia would not have cried at the morrow's prospect, when they were back in their room. He held her in his arms, full of bitterness, empty of consolation, his impatience barely controlled, until she shrank from him and they lay parted.

'If this Frenchman's like that bloody swine in Harley Street . . . ' she said; and Edward, 'He won't be. Reinach's notorious. We should never have gone to him. He fancies himself a kind of gynaecological Mark Antony . . . a plain, blunt man.'

'He was obscene.'

'Yes. I expect the French have better medical manners.'

Their appointment was for ten and they were not kept waiting. De Perry was an unsmiling man of fifty with a beautiful, elongated head and an intensely interested, sharply focused manner. Edward saw with relief that Celia liked him. Still unsmiling he turned to Edward and began to ask questions in strongly accented but correct English.

'And you have been married, let us see, six years . . . '

'Nearer seven.'

There was none of Reinach's use of vernacular words which nobody winced at in conversation and were so offensive in his famous consulting-room, at least to Celia. Professor de Perry kept his language clinical, his manner cool. There came a pause while he

glanced again at O'Dwyer's report. Without looking up, almost absently, he said, 'The question is perhaps superfluous, but is it very important to you to have a child?'

'We should hardly have come . . .' Celia began, and Edward interrupted, saying, 'Yes, it's important.'

De Perry touched a bell and presently a nurse came into the room, and he said to Celia, 'This is Madame Labiche. If you will go with her she will tell you what to do.' Then, when he and Edward were alone, 'There is no point in further examination or testing in your case, monsieur. Dr. O'Dwyer has done everything . . .' And, abruptly, 'Forgive me, monsieur, but have you any reason to know, despite these reports, that you could father a child? It is a question one must ask.'

'None,' Edward said and, idiotically, flushed. De Perry nodded and rose and said, 'I shall be an hour with madame your wife. Will you wait here? No, the waiting-room is better, there you can smoke.'

It was over an hour before they were together again, in his consulting-room. De Perry came straight to the point. He found, he explained, no physical impediment. 'There is . . .' he frowned, his English failing, '*. . . un léger décalage.*'

'What?' Celia said.

'A slight . . .' Edward looked at him for confirmation, '*. . . displacement.*'

'But not enough to matter,' he insisted.

'And your advice?' Celia said.

'Patience, madame, patience. Just . . . live your life.' After a silence he went on, 'You have considered adoption?' And, seeing her expression, 'Not as a substitute, but as a therapy. I am a physician, not a psychologist, but there are factors, the problem is a psycho-somatic one perhaps . . . in short one must admit that adoption sometimes promotes conception . . .'

They were silent. Celia had hoped for nothing, Edward, perhaps, for a miracle, not for his own sake, for hers; and yet for his too, if it would change the state of her spirit. De Perry said, '*Voilà!* It is not very satisfactory for you. I am sorry that I cannot help you.' As he showed them out of the consulting-room he touched Edward's arm and said, quick and low, in French, 'I am not a psychologist. But there is a question . . . Do you, not madame your wife, but you, really want this child?'

Edward looked at him defensively and said, 'Yes, why not?'

And, as de Perry still stared at him and Edward became aware of the magnificent simplicity of his eyes, he mumbled, 'I . . . I don't know.'

'I think you do know, monsieur.'

Outside, Celia said, 'What did he want?'

'Nothing. Another of those tiresomely personal questions.'

The sense of being guilty was strong in him as they drove out of Paris that afternoon. It had turned suddenly very hot and the fumes of diesel fuel made the air of the *banlieu* mephitic. There seemed to be small, sharp grit between his hands and the rim of the wheel. He had nothing to say but there slowly accumulated in him a charge of something like panic, a shrill intimation that if he did not speak something terrible would happen. In the end he said, 'Well, it's no good taking it tragically.' Celia said, 'No.'

'I know what you're feeling.'

'Oh, do you?' she said.

'Yes, I do. And . . .'

'It doesn't make any difference, does it?'

'There are so many other things,' he began, and she interrupted him with, 'Knitting, you mean? Or local politics, or stamp-collecting?' And when he had no answer to that, savagely, 'What's *your* other thing, chum?' *Chum* in the way, with the intention, of Doris using the word *mate*.

* * *

It became very hot. Coming into the suburbs of Pouilly-les-hêtres, the offside rear tyre burst while the car was travelling at something like eighty miles an hour. He had just seen the red-ringed 50 kilometre limit sign ahead and was beginning to brake, when this happened. The back of the car slewed round, but he did not lose control of it. As soon as he had managed to stop he looked at Celia: she was white and had closed her eyes. He apologized and she opened her eyes and gave him a queer smile and said, 'Trying to kill us both?'

There was a garage within fifty yards; they walked to it and arranged to have the wheel changed and the puncture repaired. They walked on towards the centre of the town between dignified seventeenth-century façades in want of paint, and an avenue of enormous plane trees and past a pink stucco baroque church which looked as if it had been moved from somewhere much farther south and which glowed hot in the sunshine. In front of it a tall priest stood stooping, holding a small boy by the ear. At the junction

of a short, wide side-street both of them caught sight of the bignonia vine at the same moment, and stopped dead. The trunk, rising from the pavement at their feet, was as big round as an oak and had broken and lifted the cobbles as if it had not done its work slowly but had erupted from the ground. Its branches extended over the faces of the eight houses which formed one side of that small street, and hung them with a blazing, fiery curtain of huge trumpet flowers something between orange and crimson. Everything Edward saw in that town remained for ever motionless in his memory: the church still glowed pinkly under the sun; the priest and the boy stood unchanged; no seasonal progress faded the flowers of the bignonia.

They turned down the side-street and walked slowly, away from the snarl and grind of heavy trucks on the main road. As that noise receded they became aware of music. At the end of the street, which ended against a gate into a meadow, the music was clear and sweetly audible; it was coming from the last house in the street whose white stucco was hugged by the still considerable branches of the bignonia where they turned the angle of the house. Beyond the meadow their view was cut off by a long row of densely planted poplars. They climbed the gate and walked round behind the house; there was a garden of beans on poles and narrow raised beds of lettuce and cauliflowers. Beyond the garden was a raised veranda opening out of a room whose wide french doors were hooked back. Against the light, they could not see into the room, but they could hear that it was in there that the piano was being played. The other instrument, a viola, they could see, for the short, white-haired musician, with a neat brindled beard and wearing a black corduroy jacket, stood on the veranda, his music stand before him. They halted and Celia made to draw back out of sight but Edward caught her wrist and they stood listening.

Piano and viola came to the end of a movement but not of the whole piece, for the old gentleman, after a short rest, put the viola back under his chin. Edward still held Celia by the wrist, and he called out, '*Vous permettez, monsieur?*' and the musician smiled and nodded. But as he raised his bow, a big green and red bird, a yaffle, lit in the meadow not ten yards from where they stood, and burst into its cry of raucous laughter. The viola-player lowered his bow, smiling. Edward raised his hand in an abrupt movement and the woodpecker took off and flew, yelling once again, towards the poplars. The old man tapped the music stand sharply with his bow, and he, and the invisible pianist, began to play again, the movement

seeming to be an eighteenth-century air which was familiar by its likeness to a dozen Celia and Edward had heard together. Once Edward glanced at Celia and she was smiling. When the movement ended the old gentleman put down his viola and called into the room and came to the edge of the veranda and said, 'Do you know this piece, madame?' Celia looked at Edward and he answered that they did not know it. He said, 'It is of the eighteenth century but perhaps of your own arrangement?' A woman with an unsmiling, tranquil face, over sixty, dressed in black, came out on to the veranda. The viola-player said, 'I present to you my wife and pianist.' She bowed her head and said, '*Mais montez, madame; montez, monsieur.*' They went up the steps on to the veranda while the old man explained that the music was Darius Milhaud's—a sonata on anonymous eighteenth-century themes. He showed Edward the score while his wife was making Celia sit down in a basket chair. After Edward had explained their presence, and told Celia what it was they had been playing, she, whose eyes were shining as if with unshed tears, asked if it would be all right to ask them to play again. Edward did so; they smiled and nodded, and the wife asked them if they would first 'take something'. 'Only a little more music,' Edward said, and smiling, the old couple went back to their instruments. The old man asked if they liked Brahms, and Edward said that they did, and the musicians played a sonata in F major. Afterwards Edward and Celia sat with them in the open room which smelt of fading roses and caporal tobacco, and the old lady gave them coffee and small glasses of sweet wine. When Edward and Celia left they had been with them for two hours; all they knew about them was that their two sons had died in a German prison camp and that they played music together every day.

Celia behaved rather strangely; she said that she did not want to leave Pouilly-les-hêtres. They ate an omelette and drank half a bottle of wine in a small restaurant which had only four tables. Walking idly, after that meal, they came to a small square in which four massive seventeenth-century houses faced each other across a paved court in which stood an immense plane tree, its huge branches growing at right-angles to the trunk. Under it there was a small bronze and granite fountain with an inscription saying that it had been given to the town by Jean-Richard Caillavet in 1803. They sat on a seat in the dense, damp shade, looking up into that vast canopy. 'You'll miss the racing if we don't press on,' Celia said. Edward replied that he did not mind, which had become true.

It was hot in Bourges. David's Ferrari, done in British racing-green, was outside the old coaching porch of the Hôtel des Deux Evêques. Hugget, David's mechanic, chauffeur and handyman, was on his knees beside the car, fiddling with one of the wheels. He was a man of fifty with the face of a hanging judge and malevolent manners. The car, as usual, had collected a small crowd of youths in their teens. They stood silent in adoration, or exchanged grave comment in low voices. Hugget looked up as Edward parked behind the Ferrari and shouted angrily, 'Not so bloody close.' Edward backed a yard. They went into the hotel, Celia saying, 'I believe David has that car as a lure. All those horrible, spotty boys . . .'

'They're all right,' Edward said, and she, '*Et tu, Brute!*'

'You know better than that,' Edward said, glancing at her quickly: she was smiling; and, willing to commit treachery to keep her in that happier temper, he looked over to where David was coming down the broad stairs and said, 'Besides, look what it does to a chap's face.'

It was true that of late David's face only tightened into the firm and beautiful structure of bone and clear skin, which Edward had once admired and fallen short of loving, in moments of tension. It had relaxed; fleshy without being gross, the flesh had a loose texture which was old-womanly. He waved to them from the stairs. Celia said, 'You're sometimes very cruel. At least that makes it easier for me to forgive him.'

They went across the wide, low hall to meet David. At a desk raised as high as a pulpit in one corner a white-haired woman sat posting up a ledger. Edward called to David as they drew near, saying 'terribly sorry to have missed it all . . .' Before he could go on with their excuses, Celia said, 'David, what is it, what's the matter? Something's wrong.'

'Come into the café,' he said. He led the way to it, a big room with large and well-proportioned windows opening on to the street, and dim, tall mirrors in carved walnut frames panelling the walls. 'Is there something wrong?' Edward said.

'Von Daub was killed at the Issoudun road corner.'

The waiter brought their drinks. David talked in a high, over-emphatic, excited voice, describing the accident in too much detail. Once he broke the train of his narrative to say, 'You know who he was, of course?'

'Von Daub?' Edward said, and, 'I've seen his name in the papers.'

'He was the vice-gauleiter of Rotterdam at twenty-three.'

'An able youth,' Celia said, her eyes wandering.

'Oh, terribly able. He had a wonderful organization for getting rich Jews out of Holland by fishing-smacks.'

'German resistance, a partisan?' Edward asked.

'Well, not *exactly*,' David said, in his waspish tone. 'He took their money and then had them thrown overboard at sea.'

He went on about the race, how he had come into the Issoudun corner the first time abreast of the German's Mercedes, and given way; and again on the second lap, but this time not giving way, but forcing a three- or four-inch lead and, as he pulled out of the corner, swinging the tail of the Ferrari and just touching the German's front wheels. He had not stopped, had not seen exactly what happened. 'They say he hit the verge and the car went right over, looping sideways and falling on top of him. By the time they got to him it was blazing like a bonfire. We think he was burnt alive. I had to go back. It was the proper thing to do, you see. I saw what was left of him, a sort of charred thing covered with fire-extinguisher foam. By the time I got back here I was dam' nearly hysterical. Silly, of course. It was Madame Grostête—you've seen her at the desk in the hall—who steadied me. I came in and she looked up, she sits up there all day long, looking like a judge with that huge wig of white hair. I had to talk so I talked to her, told her what had happened and all she said was, '*Tiens, tiens!*' Just like that. '*Tiens, tiens!* . . .'

He fell silent and they said nothing and then he said, 'The thing is, I think I probably tried to kill him.'

Edward had nothing to say to that but presently Celia said, 'Well, if you did it won't bother anyone but yourself. But you didn't, so don't kid yourself.' David flushed at that, and opened his mouth and shut it again. Celia got up and said, 'I'm going to bed. Good night.' When she had gone Edward said, 'Who won, anyway?'

'I did, Edward. The car will be in dock tomorrow. I'll have to beg a ride with you. Will Celia be cross?'

'No, of course not.'

'Hugget can bring the car on when he's finished it. I've given him our route, he can catch us at Tiefencastel.'

'Fine,' Edward said, 'I'm glad.' He was far from glad and rising added, 'Let's turn in. You must be tired.'

From his room Edward went through the bathroom to Celia's. She was reading and he said, 'Not sleeping?' with a sinking heart.

'Can't seem to feel sleepy,' she said, with bogus brightness and without raising her eyes from her book.

'Take a Soneril.'

'You know I don't want to get that habit.'

He stooped to kiss her and went back to his own room. He lay stiffly in bed in the darkness waiting for Celia to release him from her insomnia, to allow him to sleep; first patiently, then resentfully, then with something terrifyingly like hatred. It was an hour before, putting out her light, she did so.

* * *

Tiefencastel: afterwards, Edward did not remember anything about the place; only a picture of the Ferrari standing outside the *Französischer Hof* as they drove up, a picture which became a visual symbol of relief. And of Hugget's sullen face lighting up when David said he was going straight on, at once, to the villa; and while Hugget transferred his luggage David said to them, 'I want to be sure all is in order. Take your time. I'll expect you when I see you.'

The sky was overcast and it was cold as they drove out of Tiefencastel. Climbing, they ran into low cloud. Very improbably, it began to snow and Celia said, 'It can't be snowing,' and there was a note of cheerful excitement in her voice which raised Edward's spirits. 'It's starting to be a blizzard,' he said. There was a grey stipple of melting snow on the road and twice the car skidded as he drove it round hairpin bends. 'Time we reach the pass,' he said, 'we'll need spades to dig us out.' She laughed and said, 'The mountains are vanishing.' He asked where she wanted to stay.

'I thought Sylvaplaner, but it seems to be getting dark already.'

'It may be better across the pass.'

'I shouldn't think so. It's well over seven thousand feet, and Sylvaplaner stands at over five thousand.'

Five minutes later Edward could not see far through the swirling snow. They crossed a stream and came to a village. A man and a woman were shifting chairs from a café terrace into the general shop behind it, and when Edward stopped the man came over to the car. Edward asked him how far they were from the Julier pass and the man told him. Celia said, 'Let's have a drink here and wait till it passes over.' They went into the shop. There were tables and chairs under a panoply of smoked sausage; the shop smelt of cheese. They were served with coffee and brandy; the shopkeepers talked in thick, Germanic French about the weather. Edward told Celia, 'They say this will last a couple of hours.'

'Couldn't we stay the night here?'

Yes, they had a room and they could make some kind of evening meal.

'Then let's stay,' Celia said.

The room was like a barn, or a village hall; both floor and walls were made of pine plank. There was a vast bed with posts of elaborately carved purplish wood. The open fireplace was made of stone slabs. While Edward was fetching the cases from the car, the woman lit a fire and the man set up a table beside it. The handles of the dinner knives were of horn. Edward put the car in a stable where there were already two goats and came back to the room and looked round and said, 'What they call *gemütlich*.' Celia turned on him angrily, 'I'm sorry. I suppose we should have gone on to an international caravanserai with air-conditioning and television. I happen to like it here.'

'So do I. I wasn't complaining; just remarking.'

'It sounded like a sneer.'

'Just a very small joke,' Edward said.

The meal was a vast dish of spaghetti surmounted by six fried eggs and six big rashers of bacon. They ate it all and drank a litre of red wine and Edward said, 'This is all right.'

'A night to remember,' Celia said. 'I can hear us remembering it . . . that night when it snowed on the way up to the Julier in August.' She went to the window and added, 'Actually, it's stopped.'

He lit two cigarettes and gave her one and emptied the wine bottle into their glasses. She fetched a pillow from the bed and put it on the floor at his feet and kissed him and sat down with her back against his legs, and thrust a fresh billet of wood into the fire. There was silence between them. Celia bent her head back so that it lay on his knees and he could see her face upside-down, with her hair loose on his thighs and bright in the firelight. He said, 'You look sweet like that.'

'You don't. I can see up your nose. What did de Perry say when he called you back, Edward?'

This time he told her and she asked, 'What did you say?'

'I said yes, of course.'

'Naturally. Edward, what's the matter?'

'Nothing.'

'Yes, there's something.'

'Only that . . . de Perry didn't believe me.'

Celia sat up and twisted round to look at him and said, 'Oh, I see.'

'This light's bleak,' Edward said, 'it would be nicer with just the fire.' He made to rise, but she checked him with a hand on his knee and said, 'No. Did he ask you any other private questions?'

'He asked me if I had reason to think I could be a father.'

'Had you any bastards, in short. How quaint.'

'Extremely quaint.'

She stared into the fire. Without looking at him she said, 'And you haven't, have you? We've quite agreed about that, haven't we?'

Suddenly she stood up so that she was looking down at him and if her face was not drawn to the bone by what was in her mind or lay upon her heart, then doubtless it was the combination of fire-glow and unshaded electric light which gave her a mask of pain. Edward got to his feet hastily, as if she had uttered a cry of distress. But when she said, 'Why aren't we together any more?' he just stood there, not looking at her face and having nothing to say.

Later, when they lay stiffly side by side in that broad bed which, built for a bulky Swiss *Bauer* and his *Bauerin*, gave them space enough to be apart, it came into his mind to say that his Uncle Walter, '... the one who's in the bin,' would have said their trouble was they were *unjustified*. Celia said, 'Some time, when you aren't too busy, you must tell me some more about your interesting family connections.' Edward was angry: the wisecrack was not even original.

4

DAVID MENDOZA'S villa stood on the edge of a cliff which plunged twelve hundred feet sheer to the sea. It was called the Villa Nera, although it was white. The name may have been given to it by the villagers of Lauria—not the Lucanian Lauria, the lesser, Neapolitan one to which the Villa Nera stood in the relation of a manor. The name perhaps had reference to the Fascist official who had built the house: he was said to have been a man of cruel and savage temper, risen from the direst poverty to be a scourge of the very poor. At all events, on the evidence of his building, he was a man of taste. His house he modelled on the Villa Vicenza; it was smaller than the famous copy at Mereworth in Kent; an ivory white jewel among dark trees.

There must have been a house there before the villa was built,

for the garden, of paved walks beneath holmoaks, dark cypresses, gnarled almond-trees and a few old rose-laurels, was much older than the house. In the plain courtyard which was surrounded by pleached limes and great copper urns full of pelargoniums, and which, in one corner, had the oldest and largest orange-tree in all Italy, there had been a fountain by Cellini. This had been looted by the Fascist dignitary who built the house, from the garden of one Principe Iulio Massafra who, recalcitrant to the dictator's government, had had to take refuge in France. David, when he bought the villa and heard the story, had caused the fountain to be restored to the prince, with a polite note saying that he did not feel himself entitled to keep stolen property. A year later a copy of the fountain had been delivered to the Villa Nera with Massafra's compliments. It played sweetly in the courtyard on the evening Celia and Edward arrived: there was a wind off the sea that day and the dark foliage and green fruit of the old orange-tree, moistened by the spray carried from the water-vomiting mouth of Cellini's sea-monster, gleamed in the declining sun.

David met them in the central hall of his house, looking small and soft and grey in the dead centre of one of the great marble flagstones of the floor, saying 'I'm afraid you'll get an awful meal tonight. We're having a little difficulty . . .' He was interrupted by a very fat, greasy-faced man who came waddling in engineer's overalls unbuttoned to below the waist over grey-looking underwear, through a doorless arched doorway, and speaking with an atrocious Glasgow accent said that 'yon fella' was here again, 'the old ane', and what was he to do about it. David said, 'Send him away, of course.' And, 'Really, what a question! As if you didn't know.' Impatient and nervous, his foot tapped the floor. The man retreated, grumbling, and David explained, 'That's Macalister. He's a sort of major-domo.'

'Rather unconventionally dressed for the part,' Celia said.

'Well, he used to be a purser. I don't think he served in the smartest ships, though. It's difficult to get him to dress the part, here. Come and have drinks.'

The house was a centre block and two wings connected by colonnaded ways roofed, but open between the columns. They went along one of these to a white and gold room furnished with English Regency pieces. Celia and Edward sat side by side on a sofa covered with striped white and gold satin. David gave them whisky. Twelve hundred feet below them a red-sailed fishing-boat tacked towards

the cliff-face on a royal blue sea. Celia drew attention to it and said, 'Where's it making for?'

'There's no harbour. Only a small beach. To reach it you walk half a mile to where the cliff isn't so steep, and down a rather terrifying zigzag path.'

'It's a beautiful place, David,' Edward said, wondering who 'yon fella' was, and why Macalister had been told so peevishly to send him away. Celia asked David what sort of household he had.

'You're the only guests at the moment. Then there's Macalister and two women, not locals, they're from Naples. Oh, and a sort of personal manservant I have, Enrico his name is. He's a local man, from Lauria. His father used to be the mayor or whatever they call it. Rather an old horror, incidentally a Communist, though one doesn't hold that against him. Anyone who's mildly liberal is a Communist in these parts.'

'What's Lauria like?' Celia said.

'Miserably poor. One does what one can. But I find I've nothing for them, really, excepting money I mean. Would you like to go to your rooms?'

The stairs were not of marble, but what looked like highly polished grey granite. Celia remarked on its beauty, and David said, 'It's terribly dangerous actually. Enrico fell down the whole flight the day I arrived. He was running to meet me, eagerly, you know, he's quite young, and he slipped. Fortunately, being light—he's very slender—he wasn't much hurt.'

Their rooms opened off a gallery and adjoined. They commanded the sea. David showed them their bathroom, apologizing for it. 'My predecessor had it done by an American firm. It's rather film-starrish.' It was floored and walled with marble. The bath, about the size of a billiard-table, was sunk. Its sides were carved in low relief with a frieze of sporting dolphins. Celia said it reminded her of the Casca chapel in St. Peter's.

'At least the water's always hot,' David said. 'There's an electric thing in there,' he pointed to an apparently blank wall, 'that heats it.'

'Then I shall have a bath,' Celia said.

They left her and David took Edward to his own room. It was at the extreme end of the gallery and went right through the house, with windows on to both the sea and the garden. The door was open. David had one of those wardrobes with a long glass on the inside of the door. It had been hooked back and a young man, hardly more than a boy, stood in front of it, making small adjustments

to the knot of a dark green tie. His shirt was of silk. An open cardboard box such as haberdashers use and containing more silk shirts, lay on a litter of tissue-paper on the bed. The boy half turned as they appeared, taking his eyes off his own image very reluctantly. Frowning, David said something sharply, in Italian. The youth looked sulky; his eyes returned to the looking-glass. And not without reason: the apricot cheek, the dark and curling locks, the full, brown throat were all worth looking at: here was Hyacinth. David said, 'This is Enrico,' and again spoke to his servant in Italian, 'That will do, Enrico. Put those shirts away.' And, to Edward, 'Come and sit by the window and watch the sunset.'

Tiny and exquisite below them a striped-sailed boat moved slowly across the sea-borne red disk of the sun.

'How old is your—man?' Edward said.

'Enrico? Seventeen, or so he says.'

'He looks younger.'

David shrugged. They watched the sea turn purple. Edward left him and went to his room to bath and change. Celia was lying on her bed, doing the crossword puzzle in an old *Times*. There was a small pile of that newspaper on the boule table beside her bed. 'Macalister found them for me,' she said, and, 'Why on earth does David have such a man about the place? He's an obvious crook.'

'I shall go down and look at the garden,' Edward said.

'I shall stay here till dinner-time. Macalister says it's usually at eight-thirty.'

The garden was cool and dusky. Moss, encouraged by the spray from the fountain, grew thick over the roots and bole of the great orange-tree. Under the holmoaks it was almost dark. The few flowers still surviving on the oleanders shone whitely against the black of the emphatic cypresses. Out of the shadows moved a shadow, startling him. No blackbirds called sweetly in the gloaming of that garden, but suddenly the silence was broken from behind Edward by the *kowark, kowark* of frogs in the basin of the fountain. It sounded like derisory laughter. He stood quite still and watched the moving shadow, coming towards him, a gliding blackness against the manifold dark greys, dark greens and dark blues of the evening garden. The frog *duo* gave way to their chorus, *kowark, kowark, kowark*; the noise the creatures made was astonishing. The column of black stood still and Edward saw a face shining whitely as the rose-laurel flowers drained of their colour by twilight. From somewhere in the garden came the sickly sweet scent of gardenia. The

man, the priest before him, took a step nearer, his head swaying a little, thrust forward, emerging tortoise-like from the carapace of the cassock. He was very tall, over six feet, and lean. Wanting to see his face, Edward took out his lighter and pretended to light a cigarette which was already burning between his lips. The face was livid, heavy for so lean a body, and it had not been shaved for several days. A sore, half scarred over, disfigured one corner of the mouth. The scent of gardenia yielded to another, rank and goaty, emanating from this priest, the *foetor ecclesiasticum* so offensive to unbelievers, perhaps; or could it be the odour of sanctity? The priest said, 'Signor . . .'

'No parlo Italiano,' Edward said, hastily. There was a silence. They looked at each other. Grotesquely deforming the language the priest said, 'Signor Mendoza is in de haoose?'

'I think so; do you want to see him?'

'Is mayordomo say eez nut.'

Was this, then, 'yon fella'? The 'old ane'? Somehow, Edward thought not. The priest began to talk fast, half in Italian, half in his atrocious jargon of English. His mutilated speech and the vulgarity of his bearing, face and manners were incongruous in that tree-scented twilight. In every pause, the *kowark*, *kowark* of the frogs mocked him. Edward gathered some sense: he was the *parocco* of Lauria; one of his parishioners had business of the first importance with Mr. Mendoza. A matter of public morality and therefore his, the priest's, business. But the man, a most respectable man, a house-owner, a merchant, a man of education even, though, God forgive him, a backslider, had been turned from the villa door. It was not right; no, it was not right. The souls of Lauria were in his, in the *parocco's* keeping: such were his meaning and manner, if not his words, the drift of his tirade. He fell silent; not so the frogs. Had he, Edward asked, been on his way up to the house?

'I ouas ouaitingg.'

Lurking, Edward thought, would have described it better. The frogs, in their turn, fell silent: something had disturbed them. David's voice, uncertain, away off in the shadows, said, 'Edward? Are you out here?'

'Here!' he called, and, 'You have a visitor.' A single frog started a tentative solo, '*wark*, *kowark*. The chorus took it up. Grey and white, David materialized. The priest said, 'Ah, signor, signor.' David halted and said, 'You again!' and 'Damn the brute's eyes!' Followed what began as a whining plea from the priest and a series of sharp retorts from David. At one point David took out his wallet

and offered money. The priest took it. For the next minute or two his tone was ingratiating, wheedling, then David said something which raised the tone again; presently they were engaged in an altercation, their voices getting higher and their speech faster. The frogs, encouraged by this other uproar, raised their hoarse voices until their rhythmic chanting throbbed in the mind and became a baying of the sliver of silver moon which appeared, a small rift in the sky's fabric to reveal the heavenly light, between the great dark heads of two holmoaks. With startlingly sudden loss of self-control, the priest took a pace towards David and screamed at him, shaking a huge peasant fist under his nose. David, in a white voice, said, 'Do something. If this filthy old swine lays a finger on me, I shall kill him.' And, before Edward could step between them, with a sudden and horrible lapse into hysteria, his friend also began shouting, 'You stink, you old horror, you *stink*!'

The *parocco*, whether by the word or the manner, seemed much disconcerted. He stepped back, muttered something more, looked quickly at Edward. Next moment he was a receding clatter of nailed boots on the stone path and once, faintly, an imprecation. The frogs said *kowark, kowark, kowark*. From the house came the dull, slow booming of an enormous gong.

'Dinner,' David said and, 'God knows what it will be like.'

As they walked towards the house he added, 'I'm sorry for that—comic turn.'

'What was it all about?'

'Oh . . .' vaguely, 'a little trouble with the villagers.'

That trouble had affected the catering. As soon as the soup tureen had gone round, David angrily rang the handbell beside him. The maid returned and he asked her to send in Macalister. This time the major-domo wore a white jacket over black trousers which drooped in elephantine folds. David said, 'What's this?'

'Broath,' Macalister said, scowling.

'It's cold, greasy, and altogether horrible.'

'Scots broath. Ma mither aince tow'd me . . .'

'Bother your mother. This isn't Scotland, it's Italy.'

'Then wud ye no be weel a'vised tae get 'n Eytalian cook?' He scowled and left them. David said, 'I did have an Italian woman. Nothing wonderful, but she could cook pasta and veal.'

'What happened to her?' Celia said.

'That bloody-minded priest made her leave. I believe he refused her absolution or threatened excommunication, or some such thing.'

They're all insanely superstitious round here.' Celia looked a question. Edward said, 'The *parocco* seems to be carrying on a feud with David. He came upon me in the garden. A sort of shabby Savonarola. Smells like a blocked drain.' And, turning to David, 'What, actually, is it all about?'

The maid serving the second course saved him from answering; he poked at the dish, saying, 'Good God, what on earth . . . ?'

'It's all right,' Edward said, 'macaroni cheese. Very nice.' It was not, but there is nothing more boring than a fuss about food. Celia, eating stoically, said, 'You were explaining the row with the village. Do you mean this parson has cut off your supplies of raw material and labour?'

'He's done his best to.' David rose to open a second bottle of Soave Bolla. Edward said, 'This is a charming wine.' Celia nodded and David said, eagerly, 'Yes, isn't it? The more you drink, the less awful the food will seem, so drink up!' They laughed. Reseating himself and prodding with absent-minded distaste at his macaroni cheese, David said, 'I am anathema.'

Celia said, 'Never mind that. I want to hear about the Laurians. I suppose you've been corrupting their innocence, David. Come on, now?' She spoke in apparent jest, but her eyes were coldly questioning. David blustered, obviously blustered, 'My household shopping in the village market, with a decently free hand, has pushed prices up. It's such a tiny community, you see. Don Clementi, the parson as you call him, and a man . . . I already mentioned him, the ex-mayor, Ugo Sesti, are in it.'

'What's their objection? Surely, more money circulating in the village . . .'

'Ah, you don't understand these people. The Church and the Communists both want to keep the people as poor as possible short of death from starvation. Enough to eat and a sound roof makes men into atheists and bourgeois, you should know that.'

It was thin; very thin. Edward did not say so. Celia did, though, with a pretence at laughter, 'Come off it, David! I bet it's got something to do with Enrico. What's his other name?'

'Sesti,' David said, sulkily.

'Well, anyway, you must fight them,' Edward said, without conviction.

'Yes,' he said, 'of course. But——' leaning back and putting on a facetiously comic face, 'and I quote, "*il pericolo maggior d'oggi sta nella stanchezza dei buoni*"', Pius XII.'

'And you're one of the good, are you?' Celia said. Her smile was not kind. Edward said, 'What's it mean, anyway?' Celia said, 'The greatest danger of the times is the weariness of good men.'

'Well, that's all right. David *is* good, in that context.'

He bowed, laughing uneasily. Edward meant it; he knew, had always known, that David was good, one of the 'good-est' people he had ever known. Celia, intent on the hard facts, said, 'Sesti. Of course, you said Enrico was the mayor's son. Or the ex-mayor.'

'It's contemptible!' David burst out. 'Because one of their number gets a chance to live like a human being instead of a pig, to have decent clothes and enough to eat . . .'

'Good old macaroni cheese!' Edward said, anxious to put a stop to this incongruously juvenile indignation, but David was beyond being ashamed or amused and went on, 'It's not always like this . . . they hate me and they hate him. He's going to be something more than a squalid peasant squatting on a piece of worn-out land, and they cannot bear it. There's something singularly repulsive about the envy of the poor.' To the maid, clearing the plates, he said, 'Is there anything else to eat?'

'*Si, signor, pollo.*'

The chicken was served: they all chewed and chewed. Macalister brought in more wine and David said, 'I suppose you're doing your best, but it's uneatably tough.' Willing to be helpful, Macalister said, 'Will I shairpen the knives for ye?'

'Oh, God!'

They went early to bed: like chorus and anti-chorus, bass and alto, frogs and crickets answered each other; *kowark, kowark*, and then a shrilling only less penetrating than the high-pitched rattle of the cicadas, now silenced by darkness. From time to time the frogs raised their united voices in a prolonged shout. It seemed to Edward that Celia would never sleep through the noise and he got quietly out of bed and went to stand by her door. She was sleeping; he stood for a long time listening to her even breathing, gaining peace of mind from it, starting when she turned and muttered in her sleep. He went back to bed and slept. When he opened his eyes it was to see a pattern of moving light on the ceiling, a flicker waxing and waning. The sun was on the sea. He rose and went to the window. The whole bay showed as if it were brand new. His watch said ten to seven. He put on swimming trunks and pulled trousers and a shirt over them. Celia was still asleep. Down in the

garden the leaves of the orange-tree were wet with dew and the holmoaks had distilled patches of moisture on to the paths. He found the path down to the beach. It had been roughly hacked with a mattock, a zigzag down the face of a forty-five-degree slope, but there were tough cistus and terebinth, juniper and arbutus to hold on to, and the mingled scents of lavender and thyme and lad's love rose from beneath his feet. The beach lay in a fault in the face of the cliff. It was coarse red and black sand, dry beside the tideless sea. There was nobody with the three fishing boats painted with pitch and drawn up onto the sand. He took off his clothes and walked into the sea: the water had the same temperature as the air. He began to swim straight out from the beach, crawl, side-stroke and breast-stroke alternately. When he came out of the sea he dried himself on his shirt, having forgotten to bring a towel and, carrying it in his hand, climbed slowly to the cliff-top. He stopped to stare at a black lizard on a red stone, at the papery flowers of cistus, and to press a sprig of thyme between his fingers, under his nose. It was half past eight when he reached the top and sat down to rest and look at the sea. As he rose to finish the walk to the villa, two stocky men in their fifties, one with a heavy moustache, both wearing round, black felt hats, came along the cliff-top path. The man with the moustache had a single-barrel shot-gun under his arm. They had been talking excitedly, with much gesticulation, but fell silent when they saw Edward; the armed man stared hard at his naked torso. Edward said, '*Buon'giorno, signore.*' Both returned this greeting and touched their hats. He let them go ahead of him and followed them. There had been something about the way the armed man looked at him which made him stop and put on his damp shirt. Celia was standing in the porch when Edward came to the house. There was no sign of the two men. She said, 'Why didn't you wake me to bathe with you?'

'You were having such a good sleep.'

'I should have liked to go swimming.'

'Let's go back, then.'

'No. Breakfast is ready.'

'You look rested.' She smiled and Edward added, 'It's a nice little beach. We'll go there after breakfast.' Then he told her about the two men, and she looked troubled, and said, 'There's something funny going on.'

The breakfast-room was a corner parlour in the central block, full of light and furnished with marble and iron furniture. David

was not down. Macalister, in engineer's overalls, supervising the service of a very good English breakfast, spoke highly of the kippers, flown to Naples from the Isle of Man. David, he said, always had breakfast in his room. He left them to serve themselves from the hotplate. Celia said it was rather nice, the room, and the breakfast, and being alone. 'You'd rather have our host's room than his company?' Edward said, and she, 'He's impossible, in this state. I wish we knew what went on.'

The window on to the fountain court began at a foot from the ground. A movement outside catching his eye, Edward looked up from his plate to see a round, black hat being withdrawn from sight. He got up and went to the window. Celia said, 'What is it?'

'Someone peering in. One of my two gentlemen, I fancy.'

They were in the court, and at the sight of him the clean-shaven one came to the window, while the other still stood, leaning on his shot-gun by the fountain, looking like a partisan, a sentry in some nineteenth-century revolution of the most respectable kind, the way they had them in those days. The spokesman of the pair said, 'Is that guy Mendoza about, bud?' Edward was taken aback at being addressed in demotic American. He said, 'What does your friend think he's doing with a gun in here?'

'Him? They hunt anything round here, sparrows, anything. The guy's my brother, name of Sesti. We gotta talk to Mendoza.'

'Well, you'd better try later, he's not up yet. Can I give him a message?'

'I guess not, brother. We'll just hang around.' He took a fat shagreen case from an inner pocket and offered it. 'Cigar? They're O.K. Havana.'

'No thanks, I'll go and finish my breakfast if you'll excuse me.' He nodded and joined his brother and together they walked away into the garden. Edward returned to his place and rang the bell, and when the maid came, asked for Macalister. When he presented himself, Edward told him what had happened and said that he had better go and tell Mr. Mendoza. Macalister replied that he'd save his breath to cool his porridge, 'He wudnae see yon fella yester e'en, for why sud he see him the day?'

So Signor Sesti was the 'old ane'. Edward said, 'What do you suppose they want, Macalister?'

'I cudnae say.'

'Very well. I'll tell Mr. Mendoza when I see him.'

Macalister nodded and left them, waddling, fleshy, massively

indifferent. Celia said, 'It's that pansy boy. If David doesn't send him away, there'll be trouble. I can smell it. I don't like it.'

'It's nothing to do with us.'

'It will be if there's a *jacquerie*,' she said, laughing but not really amused. Then she said that instead of going swimming, she would walk into the village and see what she could pick up by way of gossip. 'My Italian isn't up to much, but it will do. Coming?'

'Not unless you need me.'

She shook her head. David had not yet come down when she went out to find the road to Lauria. Edward went up to his room. Enrico, white-faced and distraught, was just coming out, and shoved past him, muttering sulkily. David was sitting by the window in pyjamas and dressing-gown, and turned his head as Edward came in and said, 'Hallo, Edward.' His face looked fleshy, heavy and unshaven, a grey, old-womanly face, barring the stubble. Edward said, 'Look, what goes on here?'

'What do you mean?'

'There's a couple of characters hanging about outside and asking for you. Some of the priest's allies? One has a shot-gun, and the other a rank Brooklyn accent, if it is Brooklyn and not some other parish over there.'

'Sesti and his brother, a returned immigrant. Ignore them.'

'The immigrant won't be ignored. He calls me buddy and offers me cigars. Seriously, David, what do they want of you?'

'They want me to send Enrico away.'

'What does he think about it?'

'They're frightening him. But he wants to stay, of course.'

'He seems very upset.'

'He's very highly strung.'

Whatever David had always been, he had not formerly used expressions like 'highly strung'. It was very depressing. Edward said, 'I'm going to the beach. Coming?'

'I won't if you don't mind. I feel rather off-colour. I'm not being much of a host, am I? I shall stay in today.'

In short he was not prepared to face the Sestis; or he was afraid of another meeting with Don Clementi. Edward said, 'If those men are annoying you by hanging about, can't you get the police to move them on or whatever they do here?'

'There's only the Lauria policeman, two of them actually, and they do whatever the Sestis tell them. Excepting that they're all, police and local politicians and gangsters, frightened of Count Gela,

but he's away at his house in Rome. I've been expecting him back for some days. If he had been here, there would never have been this trouble.'

'Who is he?'

David's face brightened and his manner became a shade livelier; with a pomp which was only partly facetious, he recited, 'Manfredo Gela, Count of Licata, Duke of Canicatti, Duke of Chilarza, Prince of Pontelandolfo and Calore, Knight Grand Cross of Malta . . . oh, and Prince of the Holy Roman Empire.'

'And husband, no doubt, of an American heiress?'

'Dear me, no. The Count isn't married and he could buy out most American heiresses. He's in oil, aluminium, and half a dozen other things. He has a nice little place seven kilometres the other side of Lauria—forty thousand hectares, mostly cattle ranch and olive groves. He's about the only employer they can look to round here. Incidentally, he's a considerable archaeologist. He's dug up half the province. You'll see his collection before you go. He's crazy about early terracotta.'

'And has the authorities in his pocket?'

'By letting them dip their dirty hands in his, yes.'

'What's he like?'

'A stereotyped nobleman regretting the Bourbons. Rather a horrible old thing, really. Polished and . . . dead. Until you remember his company directorships. I loathe a gentleman in business—so much more coldly unscrupulous than the middle-class rogue.'

'Well, it's certainly a pity he isn't here.'

David shrugged. Edward left him and, taking a towel and a book, walked along the cliff-top and down to the beach. It was excessively hot and he thought of Celia in Lauria. Two men and a boy, all with feet as bare and brown and expressive as their faces, were launching one of the fishing-boats and making heavy weather of it. Edward swam and read and smoked away most of the forenoon. While he was in the sea for the last time before going back to the villa, Celia came down the cliff-path and across the dark, hot sand, wearing a bathing suit with a cotton frock over it. He waved and presently she was swimming out to him. They floated on their backs, side by side, a hundred yards out and with the sun in their eyes. He said, 'You weren't long.'

'I hitch-hiked back in a Cadillac the size of the *Queen Mary*.'

'Whose, for heaven's sake?'

'The owner wasn't in it, it was being driven by a chauffeur who looked like that womanly Da Vinci Christ, but with a crew-cut.'

Edward wolf-whistled and said, 'Who owned him?'

'One Count Gela.'

'Ah, then he's back.'

'Who's back where?'

'Count Gela.'

'No idea. I gathered that the chauffeur was carrying a letter from his boss to David.'

'Excellent news. I'll race you to the beach.'

Her crawl was faster than his and she beat him by a yard. 'This damned Mediterranean water's too warm,' she said, pulling off her rubber cap and shaking out her hair. 'Not a bit refreshing.'

'What did you find out?' he asked her.

'What's all this about Count Gela?'

'Tell your news first.'

'There's not much. Edward, it's a ghastly place, two rows of dirty hovels, a café, and a miserable street market of dusty fruit and vegetables wilting in the heat. There's a butcher's shop with half a bullock carcass hanging from a hook out in the street. The innards were still in it, or most of them. It was camouflaged, though. By about a million flies. The children—swarms of them, and very pretty, but half with swollen bellies and all with their bones showing. Even the church is wretched. God, this is a horrible country!'

'Beautiful, though.'

'Not to me, not after this morning. It's rotting. I can smell it . . . carrion. I wanted to—to smash things.'

'Relax. So you found out nothing?'

'There was a woman in the market with five small eggs and a scraggy chicken for sale. She talked a bit. Extraordinary old creature—teak face, horse's hair and eyes like a Chinaman. But she was more forthcoming than the rest. I gathered she thought Sesti a fool for not making over Enrico to *voi altri estrangere* for cash on the nail. She was hostile but candid. Lumped us all together. I wanted to repudiate David, but didn't. I gather Enrico's willing to obey his father and clear out, but the old man insists on his bringing away a year's pay in lieu of notice . . . and anything else he can lay hands on.'

'Nice people.'

'Why should they be? God, that butcher's shop!'

David was waiting for them in the courtyard. He had a table,

chairs and drinks set out under the orange-tree. Dressed in white tussore he looked fifteen years younger than he had done that morning: say forty. He called gaily, 'My neighbour Gela is back! He's invited us to dinner on Friday night. You won't starve if you can hold out till then. Well, Celia, what do you think of Lauria?'

She sat down and accepted the drink he poured. She said, 'I'd like to have the Laurians flogged for not marching about the countryside hanging the rich and burning down their houses.'

David laughed uneasily and fidgeted in his chair. 'I began,' he said, 'by giving money away right and left. It was a mistake. They sensed what it was: buying a respite from the nagging my conscience gave me at the sight of them.'

There was something either in this or in the way he said it that so offended Celia that her contempt appeared clearly in her face. David saw it and in a moment it became clear that the recovery of nerve which seemed to have occurred that morning was not real. His face went very white and soft and in a voice pitched too high he said, 'How you despise me, don't you, Celia dear?'

This was the kind of hysteria Edward had witnessed in the garden. Edward began, 'Now look . . .' but neither of them took any notice of him. Celia said, abruptly, 'David, send that child away.'

'Child!' He gave a sort of hysterical squeak of laughter, and then, with an anger, a kind of indignation rather and which was quite unconvincing and which told Edward that his friend was trying to see himself as Charlus to Enrico's Charlie Morel, 'What exactly do you mean, *child*? I suppose you realize what you're accusing me of?'

'Yes,' Celia said, and, 'Send him away, David. Don't blame him, it's mean and contemptible. And spare yourself. Send him away.'

With horrifyingly sudden loss of control, more shocking even than what he then revealed, he began to shout at her, 'I can't, you smug fool! I can't! Oh, I'd do it! I'm down to that, I'd betray him tomorrow, now, this minute, send him back to them to use as live bait for the next victim . . . that's what he was, you know that, of course you know that! They're born fishermen in these parts, but it's a very long time since the fisher-lads of Lauria, or Sorrento, or Capri confined themselves to sea-fishing. They're fishers of men in these parts, but not like the evangelists, not quite! . . .' He went on raving like that, stringing together phrases anyhow, pulling them out of the whirlpool of them which was eroding his mind, until Edward jumped to his feet and yelled at him to shut up. He did, at once.

Celia was looking at him in perplexity and distaste. Edward said, 'What, in fact, is all this about?' Rationally and dully, pouring drinks with a shaking hand, he told them, 'The Sesti brothers want five thousand pounds. To keep quiet. Enrico is . . . below the age of consent. I didn't know that.'

'Didn't you, David?' Celia said.

'No!' he shouted and, lowering his voice and looking into his whisky, 'They can probably get me two years.'

'Then hadn't you better pay them the five thousand?' Edward said.

'I can't.'

'Why not?'

'Because I haven't got five thousand, or five hundred, or for that matter fifty, at the moment.'

In a way, that shocked Edward more than all the rest: we forgive the rich so much for being rich. And besides it jarred a lifetime's habit of thought; for Edward, David was and must be a millionaire. He was about to say that he could surely raise so trifling a sum when Celia said, 'Of course you mustn't pay it. And you must send the boy away.'

'And go to prison?' he said, looking at her with sudden, detached curiosity.

'Yes.'

The pressure which her assurance, the implacable hardness of her simplicity, put upon him, was too much. Either his exasperation with what, to him, seemed wilful blindness, or with himself for feeling a rightness in her judgement, broke down his frail control again. He rose and pushed his chair violently out of the way and screamed at her, 'For God's sake leave me alone!' and rushed into the house.

5

WHEN David came down to breakfast on the following morning he looked old and ill and sulky. Celia sat eating toast and drinking coffee with a sort of self-conscious calm, her eyes cast down. Her hands shook very slightly. Edward, between them, felt himself excluded: they were alone together in some kind of struggle. He could not have been more completely the third who is not company if Celia and David had been in love.

Very much to Edward's surprise Celia presently looked directly at David and without preamble, as if they had been talking, inaudibly to Edward, for some time, she said, 'Is Don Clementi involved with the Sestis in blackmailing you?'

David, whose breakfast was confined to black coffee, looked at her quickly, and away again. He said, with an affectation of humour, 'I take it he is their dupe rather than their accomplice. He believes me to be an unrepentant voluptuary refusing to let the boy go. He sees me, you know, entrenched behind the arrogance of wealth, keeping Enrico despite his injured father.'

It was painful for Edward to hear his friend talking in this style: one of David's qualities had always been that honesty which manifests itself in the communication of thought with unaffected simplicity. Celia, almost as white as David, said, 'Isn't there some truth in that?'

'Some truth, yes, of course. If you think it is the whole truth, you must despise me very much, Celia.'

Edward felt a powerful impulse to say something, anything to break the nerve-racking tension between Celia and David, a tension as perceptible as that between two wrestlers straining in a perfectly matched hold. All he could think of was, 'I wish to God I had five thousand, you'd be welcome to it.' This made so little impression that when David answered him he had the air of a man briefly detaching his mind from an important matter to deal with a triviality. There had been a trace of resentment in Edward's tone, however, and although all David said was, 'My dear Edward, please! I know exactly how it is,' yet his eyes implored his friend not to be angry with him for needing help which Edward was too poor to give.

In the course of this exchange, and while Edward persisted in discussing this aspect of the matter, Celia kept her eyes down and her face blank. It irritated Edward intensely: he thought that she was behaving like a nun who, forced to listen to blasphemy, carefully absents her mind. Edward said, 'What about your father, David?'

'Since my mother's death he has given me as little as possible. He can even keep me out of what she has left me by simply going on living. I don't get it until he dies. If I ask him for money he will find out what it's for and not only refuse it but cut me off for the rest of his life.'

There was a silence. At once, Celia resumed her dominion over David, who, even while engaged with Edward, had paid her a kind of uneasy, almost furtive attention, as if she were a source of danger.

Completely ignoring what had passed since David had accused her of despising him, she said, 'I don't suppose what I feel about you can matter, but I certainly should not despise you, as you put it, if you did what you should do.'

'Ah, and what should I do?'

'Send Enrico Sesti back to his father. If Sesti or the priest go to the Quaestura and inform against you, leave the country. I don't believe they'd try and stop you. They'd probably do no more than cancel your residence permit.' All this she said with maddening coolness, a coolness in urging a risk on somebody else which exasperated the anger that her whole attitude of righteousness, the complacency of the justified, was giving Edward's self a chance to take charge of him. But suddenly, abandoning her calm attitude, Celia flushed and cried out, 'For God's sake show a little courage!'

'The courage of my vices, eh, Celia?' David said. He had his eyes fixed on her face and his own paleness was giving way to a dark flush, his look of age to a kind of false youthfulness. Edward thought that David's change of countenance forecast another outburst of hysterical anger: but it may have been a kind of jealousy which made him say, 'I wish you'd stop interfering, Celia, and I hope to God David isn't fool enough to take your advice.' Then, trying to lighten the tone, 'You'll land him in a Wop prison and it's he who'll have to do time, not you.'

The tension in that sun-bright room where, for a moment, only the musical sound of fountain water falling into the basin in the courtyard broke the silence, shifted. Celia's whole manner changed: for David there had been a kind of implacable goodwill; she condemned his *moeurs* and despised his weakness, yet had, perhaps, sensed in him a convert. To Edward she said, almost carelessly, 'There are better ways out of a jam than wangling or buying your way.'

'Oh, don't be so childish,' Edward said, because he did not want to—or could not—find words to express his resentment of the insult.

'Childish? Surely not. I was merely pointing out . . .'

'You were doing what you're a bloody sight too apt to do, being damned self-righteous and complacent and sure you know it all.'

Edward's tone was venomous. She said, 'Naturally, you confuse right and righteousness. My dear Edward, you don't understand. How could you? Your shabby little affair with that slut down at Goudhurst is typical: keep it dark, but when you're found out, attribute your behaviour to your good, kind heart . . .'

David said, 'Here, I say, now look, you two——' and Celia turned to him and said, 'I'm not blaming him. He can't help it. He's just a long string of negatives. Negative virtues and negative vices.' And, with that want of *pudor* which so shocks men in women —'I no more blame him for it than for being unable to give me a child. It's a sort of moral sterility——'

Edward was mortally angry: with a physical spasm of the kind of blind rage which had made him hit her in the face back at home, he said, with the bile of fury souring his mouth and rasping his throat, 'Unless, of course, it's you who can't give me one.'

David had gone very white again and his eyes, which went from Celia to Edward and back again, were full of pain. He said nothing: he had sensed that he could no more stop this than stem the tide. Celia stood up, her face livid and looked down at Edward and said, bitterly, 'Oh no you don't! You can't put that on to me too! By your own account, and behaving the way you do with as much restraint as a randy tomcat you'll have had plenty of time to find out, and it's not as if you're careful, you'll have been as sloppy in that as in everything else . . .'

'You're ignoring what the doctors . . .'

'Doctors! As if they knew anything, and . . .'

'And as to carelessness,' Edward said—he had been rotating his lower jaw until it ached, it was true that you ground your teeth if you were angry enough—'as to carelessness, that's just the point: I wasn't careful enough—once.'

'You're lying! You told me—what's your game now?'

'Game? No game. Arthur Figgis is my son. Twelve years old. Like me he's not very bright. Failed his eleven-plus.'

'You were always a liar,' Celia said, but not with assurance.

'Not invariably,' Edward said, beginning to regret hitting so hard, but hitting again, 'you must look at my bank-statements some time. You've no idea the money a child runs away with.'

Too late to prevent serious damage, David suddenly hit the table with his hand and, at the top of his voice, shouted 'Stop it!' They both looked at him. He smiled palely and said, 'That's better. Celia, that child is no more Edward's than he's mine. You're supposed to be helping me, not indulging in a domestic brawl.' Something of his occasional waspishness went into the words 'domestic brawl'. Edward said, 'Helping! A fat lot of——'

'Shut up!' David said and, to Edward's astonishment, 'Celia's right.'

Celia sat down. Edward said, 'You mean you're going——'

'If I can keep it up—yes.'

'You'll keep it up,' Celia said. Edward looked from David to Celia. The tension united them again, like a field of force which, it seemed to Edward, was only just not visible. He said, 'My Christ!' and turned and made for the door, and as he reached it Macalister came in with a telegram on a dirty silver tray. Edward would have gone round him and out, but the man said, 'It's for you.' Edward took it and, standing by the door, opened it, the others watching him. He waited until Macalister had withdrawn and, in a neutral voice, playing it for effect, for pity, though his grief was real, said, 'My Aunt Sarah's dying. She's asking for me,' and followed Macalister out of the room.

He went up to the bedroom and sat on the bed and looked at the telegram again. A minute later Celia came into the room. Her face was still set in pale hostility. She said, 'I'm sorry about your news.' He said nothing. He was seeing Sarah Tillotson's great, gaunt, gawky frame as she worked it, with a kind of madly energetic rowing motion of all her limbs, down the cinder path towards him: he was hearing her say, 'Happen one of these days you'll be punctual, you image, you! The tea's stewed'; he was seeing, behind her, that huge warning of the Lord's coming. Celia took a hesitating pace towards him. 'You're crying,' she said, with astonishment. He turned his face away. She said, 'I never saw you cry before,' and quickly, to save him from having to say anything to that, 'You'll fly back from Naples?'

'I'll go there at once and wait for the first plane I can get.' He rose as if he were very tired and added, 'We'd better go and put what we need into a case.'

'Not me,' she said, 'I'm staying.'

He looked at her, wiping his eyes, saying, stupidly, 'Staying? Here?'

'You can't expect,' she began, her face hardening and her eyes angry again, then abandoned whatever she was going to say and said, 'Besides, there's David. You can leave the car. That brute of a mechanic can go with you to Naples and drive it back.'

'Celia,' Edward said, 'you'll come home soon?'

'To England, yes. Home—I don't know.'

'What I said just now was a lie, of course.'

'Was it?'

* * *

The crisis came that evening after dinner. It was very hot and the least uncomfortable room in the house was the great hall. Celia and David were drinking coffee and brandy with the big double doors open on to the court. Celia was playing patience with a pack of miniature cards. David was writing a note; it was the note which was to ask the priest Clementi to call and take away Enrico Sesti. Celia had suggested that way of dealing with the situation. David had not commented, nor had his expression changed: with a kind of eagerness, he was doing what she told him to do. What startled them was sudden silence: the frogs had stopped their eternal clamour. They became aware of another sound, like the muttering of many far voices. Signor Sesti, the ex-American one, not the injured father appeared in the open doorway. He was chewing. He said, 'Hy'a, folks.' David stood up. Sesti took off his round hat with one hand, removed the gum from his mouth with the left, and having stuck the gum somewhere inside the hat, put it back on his head. David, standing now, and with hysteria near the surface of his voice and manner, said, 'Will you please get out of my house.'

'Now listen, brother . . .'

'Get out! Get out!'

'Some of the boys have come up, quite a bunch. There's a couple of sonsabitches among them and they ain't going to like it if you . . .'

He fell silent and took a startled pace backwards as Celia rose and went to the door. Only the other Sesti stood in the court, without his gun. But at that moment the *parocco*, followed by about a dozen men all talking excitedly, crossed the colonnade into the court. They had the look of a stage army, and their talk seemed a gabble to suggest the anger of a multitude. Their gestures, too, were for the front row of the stalls. The priest saw Celia and shouted something that sounded like an impassioned plea. Aware of David at her shoulder, Celia said, 'They want the boy, Enrico Sesti.'

'They're welcome. You'd better go and fetch him.'

'They're in a nasty temper,' Celia said. But the scene impressed her not by its real, but by its theatrical, quality: she would hardly have been surprised if the men had suddenly grouped themselves round the priest and started to sing the next number for chorus. She turned away to go in search of Enrico and saw Macalister come in and heard David say, 'Find Enrico and send him here.' She did not like the look of David's face, it was set in a sort of rictus of grief, but his eyes were fiery, a little mad. She turned back to the door and stepped into the court and opened her mouth to call the

priest to her, when there was a crash and tinkle of broken glass behind her. She stepped back. A stone had shattered the big pane of one glazed door. She retreated into the room and only then saw David, with his back to her, at a big tallboy in an alcove. He turned and she saw that he had a service revolver in his hand and immediately, with all the authority she could express, said, 'Don't be a bloody fool, David. Put that thing away at once!' Almost at the same time she realized that the choice of words and manner could not have been worse. David ignored them, or maybe did not even hear them.

David came to the doors, shoved her aside and reached for the light switch. In a moment the court, the fountain, the orange-tree, the tall priest, the two Sestis, the mischief-seeking Laurians were, as to their reality, concealed by a flood of light tendentious as romantic literature, heroic light, *son-et-lumière* light. Hollows in faces ceased to represent under-nourishment and represented starvation; the Laurians ceased to be a chorus of under-privileged and became a chorus of oppressed peasantry; eyes no longer gleamed with mischievous excitement, but with wild passions; the court was no longer a familiar part of a known house, but a 'set', over-coloured, two-dimensional, where anything could happen but it would not matter. David stood in the doorway with arms loosely hanging and the revolver pendant from his right hand. He spoke in Italian, his voice almost shrill. Celia gasped, 'God, you fool!' The leading men, the Sestis and the priest, gave back a pace, and there was more gabble from the chorus. Celia heard a clatter of leather soles on the stone stairs behind her and half turned to see Enrico rushing across the hall towards them. He dived between Celia and David, and Celia saw his face, white, with the overwrought passion which suited the scene, his hyacinthine locks in thespian disorder. David gave a cry of *Enrico!* overcharged with feeling. He dropped the gun and darted out into the court after the boy. Celia yelled at him, 'Come back! David, you promised!' and stopped to pick up the gun. When she straightened up there was a sort of rugby scrum in the court. She saw Enrico's face, white and convulsed with rage, and a great hole of a mouth wide open, bawling. The boy vanished; she saw David throw up his arms with sudden violence which was not theatrical, which injected terror into her. Then David fell, and almost at once there were men all round and over him, all but the priest and the American Sesti.

Celia had no idea how to use a firearm and an enormous reluctance to try. Holding the revolver pointed, she stepped into the courtyard.

As she did so the group of struggling men began to come apart, there were warning shouts, two or three men turned away and ran among the trees, there was a shot and a scream, two policemen in uniform came out of the trees, followed by a tall thin man and a short burly man, both in plain clothes. One of the policemen ran towards the now disintegrating scrum and began to hit a short, slight young man repeatedly on the back of his head with the barrel of an automatic pistol. He collapsed, ridiculously, and the policeman dragged him away. The rest scattered and ran. Only the priest remained, and Celia, standing over David, with the gun still in her hand. She dropped it and knelt beside him. He looked broken, like a fractured dummy; a picture of a riot victim in a newspaper, after the police had cleared the mob. A voice above her said, in Italianate English, 'Is he badly hurt?' Celia said, 'Yes, very badly,' and looking up, 'Where's the nearest doctor?' The burly man, standing beside his companion and carrying an ordinary shoe-box under one arm, said, in English almost free from accent, 'I'll go and telephone for the ambulance,' and went into the house. As he did so Macalister came out and before he could speak Celia said, 'I'm not going to move him. Get me a clean sheet, scissors, hot water, a blanket and a pillow. And be quick about it.' She was aware of herself 'coping'.

The tall stranger stooped and picked up the revolver, fiddled with it until he had found out how to disengage the revolving magazine and said, 'It is not charged.' The burly man, still carrying the shoe-box, came out of the house and stood beside them and said, 'The ambulance is on its way. It is a very great pity we were not five minutes earlier.'

Macalister came out with the things Celia had asked for. Celia cleaned David's face. He did not stir. She took the scissors, hesitated, put them down and said, 'I don't think I'll do anything but cover him.' With Macalister's help she put sheet and blanket round and over him. She stood up and said to Macalister, 'Stay with him' and went into the house, followed by the two men. When she turned to face them, the taller man said, 'You must be the Signora Tillotson. Signor Tillotson——' 'Has gone to England. Who are you, please? Police?'

The tall man was very handsome; tall, lean, swarthy, and with an air of great distinction. He smiled thinly and said, 'My name is Margravini. I am an advocate. From Rome. I was staying with——' he interrupted himself, turning to the burly man and saying, with respect, almost with deference, 'Excellency, may I present the

Signora Tillotson. Signora Tillotson, the Count Gela.' Celia bowed. The count came forward and kissed her hand and she saw David's blood on it. Count Gela had the big, red, lumpish face of an English country lout. His finger-nails were dirty and under a light overcoat his dinner-jacket was stained and creased. He sat in the chair Celia indicated. She said, 'Will you gentlemen have whisky? How long will the ambulance be?'

'Not less than an hour,' Count Gela said. When Celia brought him his whisky she saw that he had the shoe-box on his knees and offered to take it from him and he said, 'This? It was this brought me over here. I wanted to show Mendoza my latest find from our dig at Lauria Alta. It was as we passed through the village that we learnt of this trouble.' He had been speaking coolly but now he hit the arm of his chair with a square, blunt-fingered hand and burst out, 'They shall pay for this, by God!' His violence was impressive and, to Celia, repulsive. It crossed her mind that Count Gela was an evil, or at least a wicked, old man. With a second and equally abrupt change of manner, he said, 'I was so pleased with my find that I could not wait until Friday to boast of it.' He swallowed his whisky, put down the glass, took the lid off the box, lifted out a terracotta figurine a foot tall, spilling sawdust packing on the floor, and stood it on the table by his side. 'Is she not beautiful?' he said.

This utterly inconsequential intrusion of archaeology into the farcical-tragedy in which she was involved, seemed to Celia so extraordinary that she was confused. The count continued to look smilingly at the figurine. 'Nothing so perfect ever came out of Tanagra,' he said. 'It's very nice,' Celia said. The count turned and looked up at her, and said, 'But you are preoccupied with what you consider more important. You are mistaken, Mrs. Tillotson. What happened tonight is an incident. My Demeter——' he nodded towards the figurine, 'is an eternal achievement.' This coldness intensified Celia's dislike of the man. Count Gela stopped smiling and said, 'I suppose you know what started tonight's trouble?' and when she nodded, 'And you realize this outrage settles nothing?'

'Sesti can hardly denounce David Mendoza to the police now.'

'Why not? They will talk of moral indignation. Sesti, I could frighten into silence. It is this *parocco* who is the trouble. A candid soul, Mrs. Tillotson, and a sort of Jansenist. He can, of course, be disciplined by my good friend the cardinal-archbishop. But even if we threaten to send the fellow as chaplain to a penal colony, I tell you now he will accept that as from God.'

'What would Mr. Mendoza be charged with? I understand that homosexuality is not a crime in Italy.'

The count looked at Margravini who was sitting perfectly erect and still on a small Louis XV chair. The lawyer said, 'Our law is more liberal than yours. Homosexuality is not even a misdemeanour. It is, no doubt, a sin, but that is a matter for the Church, not the law——'

At this moment Macalister appeared again to say that an old woman was asking to see His Excellency.

'Who is she?' the count asked, scowling.

'I dinnae ken her name,' Macalister said and went on to explain that she was '*greetin*' and carrying on about her grandson being taken away by the police.

'I won't see her,' Count Gela said. He dismissed Macalister without waiting for Celia to do so. There was a short silence filled only by the *kowark*, *kowark* of the frogs. Celia looked at the lawyer and said, 'You were saying?'

'Ah yes. Signora Tillotson, the *ragazzo* is not yet sixteen and Mr. Mendoza is to be charged with corrupting a minor.'

'By the father, or the——'

'*Procuratore della Repubblica*? By neither. The law demands that the boy himself bring the plaint before the magistrates.'

'But will he agree to do that?'

'Why not? There is nothing more to be got from your friend. There is, unfortunately, an aggravation which, in the event of an unfavourable verdict, will add one-third to Mr. Mendoza's punishment. The boy was his servant. In Italy, the crime of corrupting a minor—the sex is immaterial—is regarded as more serious when the plaintiff is the defendant's servant, because where a servant is a juvenile the master stands *in loco parentis*.'

This counsel's opinion was interrupted by the arrival of the ambulance. The hospital doctor who came with it decided not to examine David until he had him on the operating table. This doctor was an elderly, morose man with a hostile manner. When Count Gela complained that he had taken his time he replied, curtly, nodding towards the ambulance, that he had three other cases in there, picked up in Lauria and, looking at them with more hostility than ever, began, 'Whoever is responsible for this——' Margravini, who was clearly shocked by his manner, said, 'This gentleman is His Excellency Count Gela.' The doctor looked at the count and, to Celia's delight, said, 'I don't care if he's His Holiness the Pope,'

and got into the ambulance beside the driver. Celia ran to him and said, 'Please, doctor, will you ask someone to telephone me when you have examined my friend.'

'I will telephone within the hour,' he said.

As Celia and the two men went back into the house, Count Gela said, 'An insolent rascal, but good at his job. If we may, we will wait for the verdict here.'

'Of course. I hope the others are not badly hurt.'

'Peasants, Mrs. Tillotson, don't die of scratches received in a brawl. And suppose they did? You have doubtless read Carlo Levi? The life of a South Italian peasant is not much to hold on to. And then they are so numerous! As you say in England, plenty more where those came from!'

As they went back into the room Celia switched off the outside light, which had made the whole scene of the past two hours excessively theatrical. As she did so she was aware of a movement somewhere behind her and turned quickly. She thought she saw a shadow flit beyond the fountain, but was not sure and said nothing. She went to pour out more whisky for her guests and herself. The count and the advocate stood by the terracotta figurine. When Celia approached with their drinks, the count said, 'Look at her, Mrs. Tillotson! Demeter, my tame scholar calls her. Is this figure of suffering a mere goddess? Never!' He went on talking excitedly, saying that the statuette represented Woman and the continuity of her suffering, made by an artist of genius. For twenty years he had been saying and writing that the terracottas of Tanagra were nothing, but nothing, beside the terracottas of Lauria, and now this was the *chef-d'œuvre* of that town's ancient and now nameless workmen. Could Mrs. Tillotson look upon her without feeling her kind heart bleed for that long line of pain from Eve to eternity? The gods did not suffer like this, not even Demeter whose child was taken from her to be a queen of the underworld.

Celia was not unimpressed and for the first time examined the figure closely. The lines of the little statue were vertical and stiff. The arms were straight down the sides. The left hand was broken off, the right clenched into a fist. The face, framed in but not veiled by, the hood, had the corners of the eyes and mouth turned down. It was ageless, it expressed eternal pain, and it looked forward to no relief, not even death. It was this which made her say, 'All the same, I think she's a goddess.' She put out her hand to touch the ancient piece of clay and Margravini said, 'Careful, signora. She is worth

several million lire.' Celia withdrew her hand and turned away towards the french windows: she had closed them when they returned to the room but it was airless, she missed the music of the fountain and—she suddenly noticed that the frogs were silent. Moving to reopen the windows, she became aware of a figure standing six feet beyond the glass. She turned to the room to announce this and the count said, 'Why? Why a goddess, Mrs. Tillotson?'

Celia said, 'Listen, Count, this is all very interesting, but I think there is someone spying on us, out in the courtyard.'

Count Gela uttered a wordless exclamation, strode across the room, twisted the latch of the windows and flung them open. He bawled angrily into the night. A woman, her head in a shawl and her legs in a voluminous old rusty black skirt, came sidling into the room, her face working with an expression of imploring, placatory self-deprecation, her movement suggesting that she was not really coming into the room—far be such effrontery from her!—but going back the other way, back among the cypresses which, black in daylight, showed dark green in the electric light from the room. There was in her gait, her way of holding her hands palm outwards a little away from her body, her conventionally tragic face, the face of a thousand photogravure masterpieces in fifty-shilling picture books, of old women in backward lands, a cringing, imploring expression. Because Celia had seen this image so often, it was not less, but more, moving. The way the old woman moved into the room contriving to suggest that she was not—God forbid!—really disobeying what had evidently been an order to go away, but was being pushed against the inclination of her fearful humility by some force stronger than herself, was horrible; was, Celia thought, what no human being should have been brought down to.

Because this newcomer and Count Gela spoke very fast in the Laurian patois of Italian, Celia was forced to depend chiefly on gestures and expressions to understand the scene that followed, and on tones and volumes of voice as on a musical accompaniment. For perhaps two minutes before she was given any clear, verbal clue, there was an exchange between the old woman and the count: words Celia did not know; expressions and tones and movements she did. The old woman's face worked with feeling, her passionate prayer for an end to something, to some pain which was torturing her, thrusting past the mask of submission which her life had fixed upon her. In the count, the denial of that prayer manifested itself first in curtness and then, perhaps to cover his own shame

at the rising of anger, in a noisy diatribe. Her speeches had been the long ones, and grew shorter; his had been short and now became long, breathless, loud, furiously over-emphatic and accompanied by much violent movement of arms and hands and shoulders. She had been all movement, albeit timid movement, shifting a little and a little towards him, the lines of naked pain more clearly revealed as she drew nearer to the source of light in the room, her hands fluttering, going to her throat, her breast, or out towards him. But as, from still, he became more and more active, she fell into stillness, a stricken stillness while he stamped and waved his thick arms, clenching and shaking his fists.

It was at this point that Margravini, who had moved silently up to Celia, muttered that two of the old woman's grandsons had already been taken up by the police, held and questioned in connection with the assault on Mr. Mendoza. She, Pia Agosti, swore they had nothing to do with the business, had not been near the Villa Nera, had been with her. She had, Celia said, an air of speaking the truth; Margravini shrugged and said that the police had to arrest somebody, "She complains they have been a little rough with these boys."

Presently Celia realized by his movements that the count was invoking the lawyer's opinion. His Italian became comprehensible. He had said that he *would* not help the young Agosti, bandit and Communist that he was; now let this learned man from Rome, hub of the world and source of all enlightenment, say why he could not. True, Margravini said, true: it was out of even His Excellency's power. The law had been invoked.

Margravini had moved forward a little when called upon. At his movement the old woman raised her head and turned it towards him, yet contrived, because every still muscle in her work-stricken body had been disciplined by the mortification of self and had the ineradicable habit of humility, to give the impression that she was turning her head not in presumptuous hope, much less in an imprudent attempt to pretend that she would understand what this learned man had to say, but because it is right to turn the head respectfully towards the judge, the passer of sentence. The lawyer spoke sharply and coldly, directing his words over her head. When he had done there was a short silence. Pia Agosti took a step towards Count Gela. At the same moment Celia realized that the servile motions of the old woman's muscles, with their long habit of humility, were no longer a true guide. Grief, and now passionate anger, had overcome her. Her speech became a raving, and Celia's ear began

to penetrate the obscurity of the dialect. So the law had been invoked, had it? Well, she too, for all she was as they beheld her, could invoke the law! What of the child, the little girl, Eulalia? And of others she could name? Let the count help her now or, as sure as Our Lady and Saint Humbert were her allies, they would see what the police thought of His Excellency's ways with other people's children. Yes, children, that is all they were!

That, as Celia understood it, was the gist of a threat to which the count responded like a lunatic. His face had turned livid, then almost purple. He began to shout; he raised his clenched fist. Celia said, 'No! Oh, no!' Neither of them heard her. The old woman did not retreat. The count's hands shot out and caught her by the shawl near her throat and began to shake her, thrusting his huge, furious face into hers, the incomprehensible words pouring out of his writhing mouth on a kind of prolonged scream. Distracted, Celia turned to Margravini; the lawyer was watching the scene with a slight smile in his eyes. Why not? It was certainly funny, quite as funny as a man slipping on a banana-skin. It happened to be a kind of farce which Celia did not appreciate. Twice she shouted 'Stop it!' and took an irresolute pace towards the count and his victim; not a flicker of understanding crossed their faces, his purple, convulsed, hers livid, a mask of fear and hatred. Distractedly Celia looked about for a means of breaking into their minds; she saw the Demeter and, without thought, but with a brief spasm of violent pleasure, as if it were the count himself whom she was flinging from a height, put out her hand and swept the figurine off the table on to the tessellated floor.

It shattered, but there was no crash, the thing was too light for that, a small flower-pot would have made more noise. But it worked. Count Gela heard it. Margravini stepped quickly forward to stand at Celia's side as the count flung the old woman from him and turned towards Celia and took three long strides and stood looking down at the shards of clay. Celia retreated a pace. Absurdly, she said, 'How clumsy of me!' Count Gela looked at her and with extraordinary venom, using lips and tongue as percussion instruments so that the word exploded in his mouth, said, '*Putana!*' Margravini moved a little, laid a hand on the count's arm and, obviously shocked, said, 'Excellency!' At that Celia started to laugh. All the colour drained from Count Gela's face, he shook off the lawyer's hand, his mouth opened, a black hole in a lump of horribly animated suet. The telephone started to ring. Margravini crossed to it and Celia turned

to watch his face and listen, noticing as she did so that Pia Agosti had vanished. Count Gela knelt and spread a handkerchief on the floor and began to pick up the shards of terracotta. Celia listened to Margravini's end of the conversation with the hospital. Even before he had rung off she had gathered most of what he had to tell her: that, bad as he was, David was in no danger of dying; that she would be allowed to see him when he became conscious; that she was to telephone at noon on the next day.

The last thing said to her that night, as Count Gela, carrying the pieces of his treasure in the handkerchief knotted into a little bag and Margravini, hovering over his patron as if ready to damp down any fresh outburst of fury, came from the advocate who turned at the door and, with politeness, said, 'You must expect trouble about this, of course, Signora Tillotson.'

6

AT Dr. Crispin's it was Mrs. Crispin who answered the door to Edward and, standing by the varnished bullrushes in the huge old ginger-jar which had been there, like the smell of cabbage, since Edward was eleven, said, 'Come in. He's just back from delivering a baby that was born upside-down or something. He's eating a warmed-up lunch.'

'I've just come from Italy. There was a telegram. How is she?'

Crispin came out of the dining-room, chewing, holding a napkin, swallowing hard and saying, 'Heard your voice. Got bad news for you, old soldier.' Having known Crispin since he was a boy, Edward knew the conventions of the old man's language. The doctor had called him 'old soldier': Aunt Sarah was dead.

Edward heard bits of what the doctor was saying—'Went to sleep'—'thought she would be able to wait for you'—'died in her sleep'—'best way, really.' Edward was suffering an extraordinary sense of desolation. He wanted to howl. He said, accusing Crispin, accusing the world, 'But I didn't even know she was ill!'

Presently, in the dining-room, Crispin, with his mouth full, said, 'Inoperable cancer. Liver. Three weeks and——' he snapped his fingers and shrugged and Edward said, 'Christ! That again. I can't understand why she didn't write.' The doctor took an apple and bit it and Edward said, 'I should have come to see her.'

'No use feeling like that, old soldier.'

'Did it—hurt much?'

'We do what we can about that. Heroin, in this case.'

Edward looked about the room in a kind of wildness and fear and said, 'Crispin, why in God's name didn't she write and tell me?' For a moment the doctor looked at him in silence. He sunk his long teeth into the pink-flushed white of apple flesh and chewed and said, 'I'll tell you, though it won't do you any good. It's a thing I've noticed. People are ashamed of it, of cancer. She was ashamed.'

'Ashamed?'

'They are, you know. You'd better go and see Caitlin in Ashersham while you're here. Will you want to see . . . her . . . ?'

'No.'

* * *

Edward saw Caitlin, his uncle's solicitor, and did what had to be done. Caitlin was an unprosperous man with a chronic head-cold. He was of the same dismal communion as Walter Tillotson. Like many extreme Protestants he confused grace and wealth for when, shaking his head, he said the property 'wouldn't fetch much, Mr. Tillotson,' he spoke reproachfully, as of sin.

'Is my uncle fit to come to the funeral?'

'No, sir. The hand of the Lord is heavy upon him.'

Edward reflected bitterly that that had happened which his Uncle Walter had feared: he had fallen into the hands of the living God.

In Ashersham Edward hired a car and drove cross-country to his own house through steady, mizzling rain and the falling twilight, with the lights of cars and filling-stations and advertisements broken into long-pointed stars by water-drops on the windscreen, and the wipers beating like a metronome. He was lost: he knew where he was on the map, but not why, not what he was doing. In the fug of that closed car on the greasy, light-reflecting roads, moving through the thickening grey night and the noise of countless machines dulled and compressed into one even low-pitched moan modulated by peaks of shattering percussion, he suffered nightmare, the nightmare of perceiving the earth as round indeed, for ever vanishing beyond horizons and leading back to where you were before, a surface wrapped round a mystery and wrapped by another, vast and appalling and without warmth or meaning or hope; and on the surface himself isolated in his iron box, creeping about, creeping about . . .

A nightmare and a revolt: regretting the TL.4, he began to drive

fast, forcing a way past one idiotic rosary of lights into the pulsing glare of another, skidding the car into his proper lane whenever some fool as reckless as himself came at him out of the processional constellation he drove into; and not caring for the consequences, for if he killed himself and a dozen others there were plenty more where those came from, just as good, better perhaps, only they were all indistinguishable one from another at a hundred, two hundred yards; indistinguishable and so numerous that ones, tens, thousands, millions even, had no significance off the statisticians' lists.

He got where he was going, an empty house unless you counted Benvenuta and her fellow-servant. Only the kitchen was comfortable. Benvenuta followed him about, standing to catch his eye and, when he let her, recounting some part, beginning, middle, or end, of some happening in his absence, told in her fast, nerve-racking jargon until Edward, affected by her own dramatic style, threw up his hands and cried passionately, 'Basta! Enough!'

'Il signore e amalato?'

'No, no, I'm not ill. Fetch me my letters and then go away. Cook me some supper. A dish of spaghetti or something. You can cook spaghetti, I suppose?'

'Yaiss, yaiss! Spaghetti, vermicelli, macaroni, caneloni, tagliatelli, tagliatelli verdi. You like wiz chiz?'

'Si, con formaggio by all means!'

She fetched the letters and he sat down to open them. Only one in the small pile held his attention. It was from Ivo Halloband who again wanted to see him but did not say why. Was Eileen Figgis wanting more money? And was Edward, whenever he had a charge to bring-against himself, to be let off with a fine imposed by her and her son? Abruptly, because Halloband's letter turned his mind to Eileen, abruptly and for the first time clearly, he heard his self, that burdensome parasite, claiming paternity, telling Celia that lie. Heard the lie in such a way that only then did he understand fully and shockingly what it was his self had done. Edward stood up as suddenly as if he had heard an alarm sound, and walked the room knowing the meaning of despair, his inside drained white and hollow, going over and over the round surface, but on his feet now, not in his wheeled box, so that the going round and round was slower, intolerably slow. And on his shoulders, clinging round his neck, so that he pulled at his tie and fumbled open the button of his shirt-collar, bulkier, heavier, horribly fatter with that monstrous lie, his self, getting a big boy now as Aunt Sarah used to say when he

did what he should not do; a big boy, an enormous boy, far too heavy for him to carry much farther.

But Edward took him to the office in the morning and it was almost as if the clerks and typists could see the creature on his back. Was the strangeness in him, or in them? Typists stood about in twos and threes and whispered. They looked at him strangely. He went into his own room and picked up the telephone and asked for Ivo Halloband's number. At the same time he rang for Miss Gresham. A girl he hardly knew, a junior from the typing pool, came in answer to that summons and Edward said, 'Where's Miss Gresham?' The girl looked at him, surprised. She said, 'Oh, she's away, sir.' The telephone rang. Edward asked for Halloband and, when the lawyer said 'Mornin' Mr. Tillotson,' asked if he could run down and see him.

'About m'letter? M'dear sir, it's my plice to come and see you.'

'No. I have to see Caitlin anyway. My aunt——'

'Ah! I was sorry to 'ear about that.'

They made an appointment and Edward rang off. The girl was still waiting. Edward said, 'Mr. Powel in?'

'Oh, no, sir. Mr. Evans is here.'

'Mr. Evans?'

'Well, he had to come up, of course, sir.'

Edward looked at her. He did not know what she was talking about. He was overwhelmingly reluctant to ask. And exasperated, irritated, by the fact that the office was not what it should have been, not a refuge, not familiar, not letting him fall back upon it and feel safe. What was Evans in London for? A conchologists' convention?

It occurred to Edward that none but subordinates knew that he was back. The curious atmosphere in the office, the cryptic quality in that typist child's answers to his questions, was, he knew, due to the fact that the clue, one word perhaps, or one phrase, was not in his hands. And, suddenly, he desperately did not want it, as the over-imaginative recruit desperately does not want to pull out the pin of the grenade he is learning to throw. Yet the only reason he had to feel that what, in due course, he must know would be like a grenade exploding in his hand, lay not in any mischief he had to expect from outside, but only in his own loud, inaudible, inward cry of 'Guilty!'

He got up and walked swiftly through the general office and down the stairs. The commissioner said, 'Going to the labs, Mr. Tillot-

son, sir?' Edward nodded and the man said, 'Don't forget to congratulate Mr. Chase, sir, *Doctor Chase*, I should say.' By way of explanation he produced a copy of the current *Electronics Engineer*. Edward borrowed it and, in the taxi, read a *précis* of the thesis which, it seemed, had gained Chase a Ph.D. It was called *Eddy Current behaviour at the terminals of co-axial cables*.

A Rolls-Royce almost filled the yard which was used for parking at the laboratory. Its chauffeur, a prim-looking man in a very flashy livery, was arguing with the cork-importer's van driver. Edward walked up the stairs and into the workshops and started across to his own laboratory, then stopped dead as he heard the unmistakable drawling bleat of the Prime Minister's voice, coming loud from that direction. But the great man had clearly gone mad: that persuasive and oratorical voice was raised to recite not the usual string of political platitudes, but an obscene poem by Robert Browning which, Edward recalled at once, had been shown to him in much-worn typescript and with third-form sniggers, by Chase; *Doctor Chase*.

Edward shoved open his laboratory door and stood at gaze: there was a group of men round his Voice-Fabricator. Chase was commenting the show; the visitor of honour was Reuben Lipschitz, his now white hair giving him a respectability so spurious that you wanted to grab hold of his hair and pull to make sure it was not a wig. Edward stood there by the door and nobody noticed him until the Prime Ministerial voice ceased from bleating Browning's obstetrical rhymes. Then Edward said, 'Congratulations, Dr. Chase, on eddy currents in the terminals of co-axial cables.' They all turned and Lipschitz, lively and active as ever, bounced across to him like a little dog, clapped Edward's biceps between his hands, declaring that he had been right as usual, that they'd told him Edward was in Italy, but *he* knew, you couldn't fool *him*, that Edward would be there that morning, because Nicholas had told him. 'Nicholas?' 'The Tsar, boy, the Tsar! And I'll tell you a thing I'll be publishing soon as I'm ready, it wasn't at Sarkoye Selo they shot him, it was . . . well, never mind that now. Boy, have you got something here!' He turned to gesture towards the V-Fab. 'Clever! I was a *schlemil* to let you go!' He went on like that, neither zeal nor breath impaired by age. Edward patted Chase's arm to make his congratulation less ironical. Chase said, 'Thanks. Was a time when eddy currents in a hundred miles of co-axial cable wouldn't've rated a Ph.D., but there it is, academic inflation . . .' Edward did

not attend to him, he was turning back to Lipschitz, saying, 'What d'you want it for, Reuben? Oh, yes, of course, you're C.D. Television now, aren't you? It'll come in handy for news faking.' Edward spoke without amenity but Lipschitz pretended to be amused. 'Always a great kidder, this boy,' he explained to Chase and the two silent aides who accompanied him. Edward said to Chase, 'I hope you've explained to Mr. Lipschitz that the V-Fab. is not for sale. Who got him up here anyway? You?'

Reuben paid no apparent attention to this aside, he was busy explaining Edward to his two young men. 'Clever! Clever as a whole wilderness of monkeys!' Edward wondered if the little man knew he was quoting: Lipschitz had read nothing; but he had absorbed the whole culture through his skin. And despite his own ceaseless chatter, he contrived to hear Edward's question, for he whipped round and said, 'Powel got me up here! Any complaints? What's the matter with you? Worried you won't get your cut?'

'The Voice-Fabricator,' Edward said, 'is not for sale, rent or licence,' and walked out of the room. Chase, following him, caught him up and said, 'Look, Ted, I'm sorry. Powel's orders.' Edward wanted to ask him what he knew about Powel's absence, old Evans's presence, and the mysterious uneasiness at the office. But he was still afraid, without knowing why he should be, of what he might hear. That is, if Chase knew anything, which was probably not the case. Edward took refuge in anger, saying, 'Powel's orders be damned! It was you dubbed Macmillan's voice. I recognized your taste, Doctor.'

'What was I to do? Tell Powel to go to hell? I have to eat.'

'What does Lipschitz want it for, anyway?'

'TV opera. You choose your cast for pretty faces and give them artificial voices. No big fees and no prima donnas in tantrums. That's what he told me.'

'That's a lot of crap. You don't engage prima donnas for their voices but for their status as news. Lipschitz isn't to be trusted with a gadget like that. It's what my Uncle Walter, who was so pious he went bonkers and had to be shut up in a bin, used to call permissive of evil.'

'Since when did you care about that?' Chase said. Edward looked sullen and said, 'I shall dismantle it.'

'All right. But Lipschitz himself is permissive of evil and you can't dismantle him, more's the pity. The V-Fab. is no stroke of genius. It's no more than ingenious. Someone else will invent it.'

'Let them,' Edward said. 'It won't be my responsibility if the top people get one more tool for humbugging the bottom people.'

Chase looked at Edward in astonishment and said, 'What the hell's happening to you?' and Edward said, 'I don't know. Look, I don't want to talk to Lipschitz. I'll leave you to throw him out.'

* * *

Edward went back to the office. In the reception hall a young man whose face was vaguely familiar was standing listening to a conversation between a stranger who looked like 'the Manager' in one of those wheedling advertisements published by banks, and Mr. Belsey, the firm's Secretary, whose face was dirty white. Edward passed them, then hesitated. Where had he seen that attentive young man's face before? Those very bright eyes—that almost terrier-like eagerness of bearing——. As he passed through the door into the general office, he remembered. It was Gordon: Gordon what? But he could not recall the name, only that Miss Gresham had introduced the fellow one evening when he had called for her at the office, and said, with a giggle, 'He's a policeman, so you'd better be careful, Mr. Tillotson.' Standing irresolute half-way through the doorway, Edward suffered intimations of trouble, low in his stomach. Belsey's face—but it was inconceivable that that timid old man could ever, in his whole life, have done anything to interest the police.

Edward was still hesitating when the door of Powel's room opened at the far end of the general office and Owen Evans came out followed by Green, chief of the firm's auditors, three paces behind him and reaching out a hand to him. Green's mouth was wide open—the sort of effect snooping photographers like to get—but Edward did not hear what he was saying. The old man was in a bad way, so bad that, indifferent or oblivious to the stares of clerks and typists, he was making an exhibition of himself: he had both hands up to his face, as if he had severe toothache; the white hair was disordered to expose pink scalp; and the beard, too, that patriarchal ornament which doubtless imposed respect on even the sharpest opposition where conchologists gathered, now looked tattered and bedraggled. Something in the abandoned attitude of his despair reminded Edward of—was it Gielgud?—that night long ago at the theatre in Paris when he had been so moved by *The Merchant of Venice*. Evans's innocent despair and Shylock's guilty despair were indistinguishable. In gesture and expression

Evans was saying that the curse never fell on his nation till now, he never felt it till now. Edward went towards him saying, 'Mr. Evans, sir, what is the . . .' and before he could go on the old man looked at him with tears welling from his inflamed old eyelids and said, 'Why didn't *you* warn me?' and went past him and out. Edward looked at Green, and the accountant shrugged, embarrassed: 'Shock for the old boy.'

Edward said, 'But what—I mean what's happened? I've been in Italy. What in God's name's going on here? Where's Powel?'

Green stared at him, as if trying to penetrate through Edward's words to something which he seemed to suspect behind them. He said, 'You'd better come back in here with me.'

Powel was standing by one of the windows and looking out at the rain. Edward said, 'They told me you weren't here,' and, without turning round, Powel said, 'I wasn't. Why aren't you in Italy?'

'My aunt died.'

'Oh.'

A big drop of rain, brown with its heavy charge of dirt, was running greasily down the outside of the pane and Powel was following it, childishly, with one finger-tip. But he suddenly spun round to face the room; his face was yellow and his hair a little out of set. He said, 'Perhaps you'll explain why you let that snooping bitch Gresham see the cheque we sent Das?'

'I didn't *let* her see it. She simply saw it when I opened your note. Anyway, why shouldn't she?'

'You can't be such a bloody fool as not to know that.'

Edward looked at Green. Green said, 'This isn't my part of the trouble, but I know the facts. Apparently this Miss Gresham thought the transaction odd enough to mention to her fiancé who, I understand, is an officer of the Metropolitan Police——'

'The treacherous sow was——' Powel began. Green interrupted him, 'Let's not use the big words, 'Zeke. We're in business. The girl was doing the best she could for her future husband—like you and me and Tillotson, thinking of number one. No doubt the young man is ambitious.'

'Get on with it,' Edward said.

'This policeman took it on himself to cable to India about a company in which, as Powel tells me, he and you believed yourselves to be investing this twenty thousand.'

'That's Das's story—and mine,' Powel said: his over-bite was

noticeable, the teeth, not so white as his skin, were resting on the indrawn lower lip.

'The company,' Green said, 'does not exist.'

Edward had known that. Slumped in his chair and feeling drained, bloodless below the waist, he said, 'I signed that cheque. What's our position?' Green said, curtly, 'I'm not a lawyer.' Powel went to his desk, scuffled among some papers, and picked up a letter. Edward recognized the letter-head as that of the firm's lawyers. Powel said, 'This is from old Balham,' and read aloud in a manner which attempted to mock the substance of his reading: 'By the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1906, it is a misdemeanour punishable with two years' imprisonment and/or a fine of £500 to offer to an agent, or for an agent to accept or attempt to obtain, any gift or consideration as an inducement to do or forbear to do anything in relation to his principal's affairs or business, or for showing or forbearing to show favour or disfavour to any person in relation to his principal's affairs or business. An "agent" includes any person employed by or acting for another. It is similarly punishable knowingly to give to any agent, or for an agent knowingly to use, any receipt, account or other document in respect of which the principal is interested, and which contains any statement which is false in any material particular and which is intended to mislead the principal.'

When he had finished reading Powel threw the letter on the desk, went to the cupboard where he kept his hat and coat and said, 'We've done for today, I suppose.'

'Tillotson has a right to know the whole story,' Green said and with an unindulgent look at Edward, 'unless he knows it already.' 'I don't,' Edward said. Powel said, 'To hell with Tillotson. I'm all in.'

Green ignored that and started talking. 'The disclosure of the facts to the police has brought them in here to examine the books. They have uncovered something else, something much worse—'

'Rubbish!' Powel said. Green again ignored him and started to explain what the detectives had uncovered. Edward had the utmost difficulty in following the accountant's explanation but none in understanding why he had suspected nothing although he had, apparently, signed more than half the papers in question himself. It was borne in on him that the difference between what was and what was not fraudulent in the manipulation of large sums, was merely conventional. Yet he did begin to understand, and to realize what he had been doing when—making a stale little joke of his own

helplessness—he signed whatever the old, grey-faced company Secretary, who now emerged as playing jackal to Powel's lion, had told him to sign. As Green's explanation continued, Edward fixed his eyes on Powel who was pacing the room, chin down on the knot of his tie and showing, for the first time, the slack folds of advancing age. Edward interrupted once, in a sort of protest at the outrageousness of what Green's calm voice was saying, 'But it's fantastic! You can't raise money on non-existent goods.'

'Existent on paper, Tillotson. Existent in the books and on the balance sheet. I don't say that Barrowby at the bank hasn't been damned careless. In theory there should have been an inspection of the property before the money was advanced. On the other hand, the firm's credit has always been excellent, there had been a dozen similar transactions, Barrowby had no reason to worry. After all, even we didn't realize. You can't be more shocked and surprised than I was.'

'Quarter of a million,' Edward said, 'advanced against a figment of Powel's imagination!'

Green went on with his explanations until Edward interrupted to say to Powel, 'Why didn't you skip out? I wonder you didn't.' Powel did not resent that, but stopped walking about and stood still to look down at Edward. There was a kind of wicked nobility in his white-faced arrogance when he said, 'You fool! You don't understand a thing about it. One more month and we'd have been in the clear. And nobody any the wiser. And you and Evans would have pocketed your share of the proceeds without any questions.'

Edward looked at Green, who nodded and said, 'It's true. As I've told you, the money went to buy shares in Goshawk Products and in Volta Pellegrini. There's no doubt that their merger will go through. The gamble was a perfectly sound one.'

'So this catastrophe is just bad luck, eh?' Edward said, and, 'Why hasn't Zeke—why haven't we been arrested?'

'You will be when the police are ready. Powel's being watched and so, no doubt, are you.'

What had Powel wanted all that money for? Edward watched him getting his hat, gloves and umbrella from the cupboard. There was a small looking-glass on the inside of the cupboard door and Powel paused to look in it, took a comb from his pocket and passed it through his hair. Then he walked out of the room. But he stuck his head back through the doorway to say, 'You'll have to find your own way out, Ed. I know mine.'

Edward said to Green, 'Who's really the injured party, Green?'
'The Law.'

'Let's be what they call realistic.'

'As far as I can see, nobody will suffer actual loss.'

Edward was still wondering what Powel had wanted the money for: he had not taken him for a man who wanted to live magnificently, and had, rather, thought that he had in him a certain moderation, a certain carefulness, as if keeping a firm hand on that potential but never actual *loucheness* which Edward, or rather Celia, had recognized in him and sometimes been afraid of. Perhaps Powel had wanted to feel much taller, much stronger, and therefore much safer.

* * *

There seemed something absurd in keeping his appointment with Halloband after that, as there was outrage in the indifferent beauty of the following day, the day of his Aunt Sarah's funeral. He had not slept; he had spent the night reading the memorandum and studying the figures Green's people had prepared for him; and writing to Celia. In the train to Ashersham he suffered a desolating sense of unreality, of being quite literally at a loss.

The County Hotel was not what it had been. The bar, once sombre in brown Lincrusta, now had three different kinds of light-coloured wallpapers. The new barmaid was forty-odd pounds lighter than the old one but had the same bust measurement. There had formerly been tables in pews, and Edward had counted on one for privacy. They had gone, as if the highest Anglicanism had, belatedly, spread from churches to pubs. Halloband, portly, his clothes rich but not gaudy, came in a few minutes after him, and cancelling, with Edward's permission, the whisky and soda Edward had ordered, told the girl to 'fetch up a bottle of yer eighty-four Madeira, m'dear,' in such a tone as almost restored the three stone of flesh and the high colour of her predecessor. He talked to Edward of the weather and of his annual day's shooting at Draxter: 'The marquess always invites me, as he did me father before me, God rest his soul. But it ain't what it was, Mr. Tillotson. Only two keepers kept and no grite wight o' gime.'

He told Edward the bag as they sat in a corner at their bottle, and such was the power of his integrity that it seemed to transform the Formica table-top into a decent piece of mahogany. From pheasants he passed to business.

'Now about Miss Figgis. You know, Mr. Tillotson, I admire

that young woman. The boy's a limb of Satan but she'll mike a man of him.'

'What does she want this time?'

'She has a chance to emigrate with the lad to Austrilia. Yes, sir, to the very antipodes! Kangaroos, eucalyptus trees, bunyips . . . moreover, as a wife, sir.'

'She wants to marry?'

'Has a chance to, at least. Fella's a tractor-driver. Might be eight, ten years younger than she is, and asks no questions about how she cime by the little bye-blow. The sort of man, sir, that opens his mouth three times a day, to put food in. The case stands thus, that they're short of what they need by four hundred pounds.'

Edward said, 'I'm short of what I'm going to need by a lot more than that.'

They had drunk half the bottle of that sweet and ponderous wine. Halloband said, 'Suppose we finish this with a chump chop and a biked potato, sir?' Edward agreed and they went into the coffee-room, but it was called the dining-room now. The chop and the potatoes were ordered, and having ascertained that there was a Stilton cheese in the house, Halloband reminded the waiter that he had that morning ordered that a bottle of *La Mission Haut Brion* be brought up from the cellar. 'It's incredible, sir, but they 'ave some of the twenty-one.' It was all the same to Edward, but he looked as impressed as he could. As they waited to be served, Halloband said, 'Allow me to seye that I should understand if, in the circumstances, you felt unible to put yer 'and quite so deep in yer pocket. At the same time——'

The lawyer hesitated and it was manifest that he was ill at ease. Edward was very surprised for he had never seen the man's assurance fail him before. 'At the same time?' he prompted.

'I am in a difficulty, sir. I don't like me mission, Mr. Tillotson. Me client's instructions force me into a role, sir, that I'm not accustomed to pl'ying.'

'Out with it, man.'

Halloband swallowed the last of the Madeira and, keeping his eyes on his glass as he returned it to the table, said, 'Me client tells me that you and she——' Edward interrupted, 'That intimacy has taken place—isn't that your lawyers' phrase for it?'

Without commenting on that at all Halloband said, 'This project of marriage and emigration 'as 'ad a surprisin' effect on the young woman's character, sir.'

'Is there a threat lurking in all this evasion, Mr. Halloband?'

Halloband cut off a large piece of chop and bolted it; washed it down with claret and said, 'If you'll believe me, Mr. Tillotson, I'm standing between yourself—or shall we say Mrs. Tillotson?—and me client's determination, to which, sir, she gives the good countenance of righteousness—not to spoil 'er future for want of four 'undred pound.'

'You mean Eileen will go to my wife if I don't cough up? I wonder she should threaten me. God knows I've been generous to her.'

'She complains, sir, that you take too much for granted. I only agreed to 'andle this because—well, sir, for your sike, not 'ers. She wouldn't be averse to marry you, I fancy: certainly it rankles that you never suggested it.'

'So she wanted to force a divorce on me.'

'She was capable of it, Mr. Tillotson. You wouldn't want that?'

'No.'

'You're right, sir. As I see it, we must err in the flesh but we're not obliged to publish the fact. I'll tell you what divorce js, Mr. Tillotson: damned vulgar.'

'I'll pay you the four hundred, of course.'

Four hundred more or less was not going to make much difference to Celia if he spent the next two or three years in prison. As if ashamed of his victory Mr. Halloband said, 'Austrilia is a long way. You may be pretty sure this is the last time.'

'She will not, I hope, expect the allowance continued?'

'God bless me soul, no! A married woman. I should not have consented to put forward me proposition excepting by wiy of a composition.'

This behaviour on the part of Eileen Figgis seriously eroded such confidence as Edward had in his power over his self and which had derived from the feeling that towards her, at least, he had always behaved selflessly. He had not, he told himself bitterly, been generously helping a friend of his youth; he had simply been under-paying a whore.

7

THAT luncheon with Halloband was Edward's last touch for a long time with anything he recognized as reality. He passed, as one

learning a foreign language without grammar, into a wonderland: the back-to-front, upside-down, inside-out world of Powell's manipulation.

There was a day, one of many, when with Green and a fraud-squad detective and two of Green's clerks, after hours of concentration on figures and on what these men called explanations, Edward was suddenly attacked by a conviction that either they were mad or he was. With perfectly serious faces they discussed, as a commonplace, as acceptable, financial conduct which, by those reasonable standards established for the purposes of ordinary intellectual, or for that matter practical, intercourse, was either hilariously funny, or tragically insane, depending on your point of view. He had had days and nights of this and of making decisions in a world whose tongue and manners were nonsensical, as if he had been embarked as captain on some latter-day cruise in pursuit of the Snark, a Snark which invariably turned out to be a Boojum. He lost control of himself and jumped to his feet and shouted, 'The whole bloody system's mad. Mad and dangerous! Why pick on 'Zeke Powell? What's he done that the others haven't done? Why not arrest Green, here, or Barrowby, or the Archbishop of Canterbury?'

He walked out of the room and went out and to the laboratories, and spent two hours on the work he had in hand: he was creating a perfectly sung version, on tape, of *Il Trovatore*. He finished some calculations and then played back the last piece of finished work. He sat on his stool and heard the divinely beautiful voice he had made sing,

'Home to our mountains,
Let us return now'

No human throat had produced those ravishing sounds, that unbearably moving pathos; behind it lay calculations and the work of some complex machinery. But tears came into his eyes and because of them he was more confused than ever. He began to see himself and above all Powell as victims of a cruel and obscure tyranny, as forbidden to return to *their* mountains. He made up his mind to go and see Powell that night, and after a hasty meal at the hotel in Kensington where he had taken a room, Edward walked to Powell's flat, which was the whole top floor of a new building in Knightsbridge.

For some reason the door of the flat was open and, having rung

the bell, Edward went into the hall, a long corridor with the doors of all the rooms opening into it. Nobody came and Edward stood irresolute. In the room at the far end of the corridor, which was the kitchen, Powel's Austrian cook was listening to a radio programme of *Lieder*. The tenor voice was magnificent, and for a moment Edward stood and listened, moved by the quality of the voice as the singer released its full power, articulating every word perfectly,

Unsere Liebe sie trennet sich nicht, the heart-cry reached him, throbbing, in that carpeted and silent corridor,

Fest ist der Stahl, und das Eisen gar sehr,

Unsere Liebe wer wandelt sie um.

He waited for the end of the song. As he moved back towards the front door, thinking that the bell might be heard now that the singing had stopped, Edward felt purified; he promised himself to start going to concerts again as, taking a cigarette, one promises oneself to stop smoking. Still nobody came; he walked along the corridor and now heard piano music coming from the kitchen. He recognized Chopin's *Fantasia Impromptu*. He went back to the door of what he knew to be the drawing-room and opened it, saying, 'Powel? Are you there, 'Zeke?' He went in.

The only light came from a heavily shaded standard. The log fire in the steel grate had died down into a mass of glowing ash, the glow pulsating like a failing heart. Powel sat very still in one of the arm-chairs pulled up to the fire. It occurred to Edward that he was asleep and he walked round to look into his face. Powel's wide-open eyes shocked him, for he was obviously not awake. The moment Edward put a hand on Powel's shoulder he knew he was dead, and that it was futile to shake him, as he frantically did; and to call on him, 'Zeke! Zeke! Powel! Wake up man!' as frightened as if he not only felt guilty of Powel's death, but *was* guilty of it. In his horror, Edward handled the body roughly and, suddenly pressing too heavily against his hand, the massive thing tumbled forward and toppled sideways, crashing into the hearth.

Edward backed away as if the dead Powel had set about him. There must have been a small, hot cinder in the hearth, for there was the ammoniac smell of burning hair. At the door Edward switched on more light, then went out into the hall to the telephone. He did not know their doctor's name. He dialled three nines, and a male voice said, 'Emergency line, do you want police, fire, or ambulance?' 'Doctor,' Edward said, and gave the address loud and clear and hung up. He walked down the long corridor to the kitchen,

Brahms's *Rhapsody in G Minor* growing louder as he went. He went straight to the kitchen radio and switched it off. The cook, a large woman with coils of blonde hair like new manilla cable, was sitting at the kitchen table. She stood up and opened her mouth and Edward said, 'How long's Mr. Powel been sitting in there?' 'Since lonch,' she said and, 'Vy you . . .'

'Mr. Powel is ill,' he said.

'Ill? He vas . . .'

'Mr. Powel is dead.'

She sat down heavily. Edward left her calling on God in German, and went back to Powel, and waited, resenting Powel's desertion.

They found the empty sodium amytal phial in his jacket pocket. He had eaten all of them.

* * *

Edward was thinking of trying to telephone Celia from the office late the following afternoon, when she walked into it unannounced, smiling palely. He was so startled that he said, 'You might have let me know you were on the way.'

'Everything has been happening so fast,' she said. It was not an apology.

'Thank God you're here, anyway.' He stood up and went towards her. As if absently she drifted across the room, away from him. Edward went back to his chair. Celia sat in the clients' chair, by the window, and said, 'What's happening?'

'You know Powel made away with himself?'

'I saw it in the papers. One of them said the police might be making another arrest.'

'Me.'

'But why?'

'Jointly responsible. They have a score of signatures of mine to prove it. A perfectly good case.'

Celia said nothing for a while: twice she began to speak and thought better of it and at last said, wearily, 'I'm sorry.'

Her mind was not on his troubles, nor, as presently appeared, on her own. 'You don't ask about David,' she said.

'I gathered from your letter that he was recovering.'

'I don't mean that. You're not the only one who's in trouble with the police.'

'They're pressing the charge?'

'Hard. I've been busy among the Sestis and Clementis and the whole scabrous, sleazy crew. I could stop the whole thing tomorrow

and bring David home in a flying ambulance. It's just as Gela and his shyster said, a matter of money. And what isn't in our world?

There was a singular inwardness in Celia's manner: it had been in the letter which he had received from her; he had seen something of the sort in her father during the long ordeal of his dying; the still attentiveness of a predator watching prey, that attentiveness given to something which was happening inside him but against his will.

'There's nothing for you to do,' Edward said, 'but give up. I know how far you've gone beyond your own inclination in the help you've given him already.' And then, although he was certain that he had sacrificed his right to her help, he said, with uneasy facetiousness, 'I could do with a spot of moral support myself.'

She looked at him almost absently and said, 'You've never needed my help.'

That had been his sin as it had been Mr. Woodreeve's, but he denied it and went on, 'And what's happened to you? There's something.'

She gave him a quick, furtive, almost guilty look and then turned her eyes to the window and said, 'I was sitting with him in the hospital one afternoon. David was asleep, or dozing. The room was darkened but the sun was coming through the curtains and drawing a line of light on the wall above his head. I was thinking of leaving him. I stood up, looking down at him, and suddenly saw that his eyes were wide open and full of stark terror. It was inexpressibly shocking. I was going to ask him what he was afraid of and then I saw that he wasn't awake. The muscles round his mouth were twitching and I realized that he was trying to talk and couldn't, as if he were paralysed. Then he began to make inarticulate sounds, only they weren't quite inarticulate and they rose to a kind of awful shouting, all vowels, full of horror, yet when I realized what he was trying to say it was only "Wake me up! For God's sake wake me up!" I took him by the shoulder and said, "Wake up David" or something of the kind . . . I had a sense of extreme urgency as if something dreadful would happen to him if I could not wake him at once. He came to himself with a violent start and lay there panting and sort of sobbing until he saw me, saw my face, and then he said he was sorry, he'd been having a nightmare. He said he had them often, several times a month, and always the same, he was in a very small room with no door or windows, a closed box and there was something in it with him, he could never see it because whichever way he turned it was always behind him, and anyway he was sure that it

had no form. He called it the essence of terror. I was inclined to shrug it off, only that his face, his manner . . . I said something about a physical stimulation of the gland that puts something into the bloodstream when we're frightened probably producing the symptoms of fear when there was nothing to be afraid of. He would not have that, he said he knew there was something in the box with him and he could not *not* want to see it, but if he ever did, that would be the moment of his death. All that seemed to me, despite the state he was in, quite childish, but then he said a dreadful thing, he said, "Sometimes I think the thing in there with me is myself".

Celia had become very disturbed as she talked: she had risen and was walking about the room and she was very pale. Edward said, 'Well, go on.' She sat down again and looked at him with a little frown and said, 'When David said that, Edward, a horrible thing happened to me. At first a sort of sharp uneasiness like a premonition of severe pain; then I seemed to be involved in David's terror; but it wasn't that, there came a cloud of dark terror over my mind and deep misery which could only be absolutely personal. It was inexplicable until, almost at once, I had the key. It was something that had happened to me when I was a little girl and which I had utterly forgotten, would have denied if anyone else could have told me that it had happened. Only David's image of fear as himself could have re-created it. I was alone in the house with my father, I don't know how old I was, but probably five or six. I suppose I had been naughty, though I can't remember what I had done. He took me upstairs, I can remember that I was howling all the time, and shut me in the tiny cupboard of a room we called the box-room, a place about six by four with nothing whatever in it. It would have been quite dark but for a dirty fanlight over the door, which let in a sort of brown twilight from the landing. There'd been a small window but the glass was cracked and it let in water, and the landlord had had it covered by nailing a sheet of roofing-felt over the outside, which made the window into a kind of dim looking-glass. I sat on the floor, crying. Then . . . I don't know if he did it on purpose or if he'd forgotten . . . I heard father go out and slam the door. I became very frightened, the ordinary fright of a small child locked in a room in an empty house and terrified at the idea of being forgotten, perhaps for ever. Then that window began to worry me. When I looked up at it I could see a faint image looking down at me. At first I was brave and made faces at it, but the faces it made back at me began to terrify me because—it is ridiculous enough now but

it wasn't then—I can distinctly remember not being absolutely sure which of us had started it. I tried to get the door open and when, of course, I couldn't, I began to scream and beat at it. I knew, of course, that when I was not looking into the mirror, I mean the window, there was nobody there, yet what was so terrifying was that the image present to my mind as I beat and clawed at the door was not that of my back, but still of my face. By the time my mother found me an hour later I had made my hands bleed and was half out of my mind . . .'

This long account which Celia gave him caused Edward pain, even that curious physical pain in the loins. He found that hour or two of extreme wretchedness long ago in Celia's childhood, now almost unbearable; yet how often had he not inflicted suffering on her himself? He had nothing to say and he still did not dare go to her as if there were no ill-feeling between them. Presently Celia said, 'David mustn't go to prison, Edward. I was wrong.'

Inexplicably to himself at the time Edward's feeling when Celia said this was one of envy, but all he said was, 'We can try to get the money from his father, though David thinks it's hopeless.' To his surprise Celia said that she had already done so. 'He's over eighty, as straight and stiff as a board and a kind of spuriously noble manner. I think he's a moral confidence trickster. He listened to me without batting an eyelid and with his eyes perfectly still, fixed on my face. When I had no more to say the old man stood up and looked down on me and without raising his voice said, "My son, Mrs. Tillotson, is a pervert and a sodomite. He has spoilt his own life, killed his mother and embittered my old age. I will do no more, and certainly I will not give a shilling to evade a law I thoroughly approve." I saw he meant it, that he hates his son. It was—revolting. I knew I'd been wasting my breath. I offered to pay him back over ten years if he'd lend me the money—he gives fifty thousand a year to charity. He rang for his secretary and had me shown out.'

Celia stood up and crossed the room and sat in another chair, just to be moving. Edward now had no doubt of her purpose and said, 'So you want me to get the money.'

'Yes.'

'I suppose you realize the position?'

'Of course I do. David won't survive six months in an Italian prison, he's already back where he was that time I first met him, in Wales. He'll get at least two years.'

'Yes. Actually, Celia, I meant *my* position.'

'You can get five thousand, Edward.'

It seemed to him an extraordinary statement. It was not, of course; for years he had been giving her the impression from which her confidence derived and if she chose to ignore the fact that she had long since come to distrust that impression, that was her right. For a moment Edward stared at her and her face became hostile and sullen and she said, 'You can do wonders if you want to, or so I've always been told. Even beget sons.'

'Celia,' Edward said, with that feeling of despair which is like an anguish in the heart, 'you know I was lying, you know it.'

'Can you get the money?' she said.

'Are you going to stay at the house?'

'No. Where are you staying?'

He told her. She said she would take a room there and, 'I'd better go now.' Edward said nothing until Celia was at the door, and then he said, 'There's one thing. I'll act quickly, but they may arrest me even sooner.'

She came two steps back into the room at that and said, 'You're not serious?'

'All right, I'm not serious.'

With sudden passion and the blood mounting to her face, she said, 'How am I to know? You've bluffed me so often I . . .' To stop her Edward shouted at her, 'Don't say any more!' He was in a kind of panic, as if he thought her about to say something which would be a mortal danger to him. For a moment they looked at each other in silence. She said, 'If it were for myself, if David weren't in such . . .'

'Yes, all right, forget it. Leave me alone, Celia.'

When she had done so, he knew at once what he would do. The house was on mortgage. He owned nothing; he never had owned anything. There was the Voice-Fabricator, though. He had made it, such as it was, an addition to the manifold instruments of fraud; it was his. In an obscure revolt against all he had been and done in his life, he had wanted to destroy it, to avoid contributing any more to the accumulation of deceitful inhumanities, the tools which made our particular brand of mid-twentieth-century petty evil so much easier to do. Now he told himself that this was grossly sentimental; there was even something ridiculous about the very idea; you could accomplish nothing but what the community you were born into called out of you. That, at all events, was his excuse for making an appointment to see Reuben Lipschitz the next day.

* * *

Edward jumped off the bus outside his hotel and went up to Celia's room. He found her sitting in a tub chair by the gas fire, doing a crossword puzzle. She looked up and said he had been a long time.

'Reuben talks,' he said, and gave her the envelope, telling her to take it to the man in Turin whose name and address were on it. He would give her the money in lire. 'You'll have to go by train and break your journey, but you'd never have smuggled five thousand pounds in notes through the Customs.'

She put the envelope into her bag, saying, 'I suppose it will be all right.'

'I never knew anything Reuben arranged to come unstuck.'

She said nothing to that, but kept looking at him oddly, and then, almost in embarrassment, away again; and at last she said, 'Edward, there are two men waiting for you downstairs. Did you know?'

'I didn't,' he said, and felt himself lose colour, 'but I'm not surprised. I wonder they didn't follow me up.'

'I asked them to give us fifteen minutes. They seem to trust you not to run away.'

'Where would I run to? Stallybrass, that's the inspector, knows me. He calls me "you people". "You people" this, and "You people" that. It expresses contempt with courtesy. Marx never invented a category of lumpenbourgeois, but that's what Stallybrass means.' The gas fire hissed and the air was faintly tainted. Celia sat on the bed and said, 'I hadn't . . . fully realized. So much that happened to you always had . . . a sort of vagueness. This isn't vague. Edward, when I've finished this business and when you've . . . finished yours . . . you do understand that the constraint I'm under isn't much less than on you . . . ? . . .'

He nodded.

' . . . what I mean is, what are you going to do, then?'

'I don't know,' he said, 'and I don't care.'

'Not very-helpful,' she said, gently.

'One thing I know,' he said, 'if I have the heart to do anything I'm going back where I fit. There are two kinds of people now, top people, surface people, up and up and up people, jet people, Lunik people, the big expense account boys doing it all on the firm like Khrushchev, only they can't all be that big. And the others, the rest of us, the undergrounders whose instinct is to seek littleness and darkness, the small, crowded room with drawn curtains and the red glow of the electric fire, like womb-light, and blue glow like moonlight from the television screen, and the shadow show on the

screen like the shadow show on the wall of the cave which men took for reality in . . .'

'In bloody old Plato,' Celia said. 'That pansy!' She added, 'What's all this add up to?'

'God knows. Say a radio and television shop, quick service and repairs a speciality, in one of those new towns which have houses with a sort of thin look, like cardboard, and two rows of double pink flowering cherry not more than six feet tall . . .'

He had spoken bitterly, but to his surprise she said, 'All right, call it that, but will you have the means even for that?'

He shrugged, 'If I meant it, I suppose Aunt Sarah's legacy would start me. And given time I can probably compound my FB royalties.'

Silence again and then she said, 'Well, then, let's do that.' He had been pacing the little room and had his back to her when she spoke. He spun on his heel and stared at her and felt his face flushing. 'Us? Why you?'

'It's very bad for you to be sorry for yourself. I can make sure it won't be like that. Edward, do you really have to ask why me?'

He did not, of course. He knew that just as her pains and *Angst* made their way into him, so did his into her. She had a concern to cherish him if only it would enable her to shed herself. She could do him that priceless service, too—give him someone to forgive.

There was a sharp rap on the door. They both lost colour and looked at each other in sudden despair. Celia said, 'Oh God, Edward . . .' He said, absurdly, 'Oh, well, never mind . . .' and called out 'Come in!' Stallybrass, followed by another man in plain clothes, started talking as soon as he had the door shut behind them. 'I'm sorry about this, Mr. Tillotson . . .' this very briskly. 'But the fact is . . .'

'That you have a warrant for my arrest,' Edward said, because it was not so bad if he said it for him, 'and anything I say may be used in evidence.' And, to Celia, using for the last time the jargon of the world he was being kicked out of, 'Not to worry.'

8

HE would not have thought it possible to take so little interest in his own trial. His inclination had been to plead guilty, explain

briefly what had happened to get him into that court, and let judge and jury do their worst. He wanted the thing over quickly so that he could stop being looked at. He had not consulted or employed Ivo Halloband: that lawyer belonged to the past which was already shadowy; the present misery was alone substantial.

Edward's solicitor was chosen by Reuben Lipschitz: he was a clever, elegant cynic, always cheerful. Had it been only the law, and not himself, that Edward suffered for having offended, this lawyer would have been very good for him; he seemed to regard the law as a kind of booby trap which his client had been unlucky enough to fall into. He insisted on instructing an overpaid Q.C., and when Edward said that mercy, let alone justice, was too damned dear at the price of this pleader's monstrous fees, which were vastly beyond his means, the solicitor astonished him by saying that he had seen old Mr. Evans and that the firm would pay for Edward's defence. Edward was never so surprised in his life and he wanted to know why, but all the lawyer could ever get from Evans was a muttered explanation that Edward Tillotson had served the firm well. The lawyer's explanation was that Evans knew that if Edward were guilty, then so was he. Edward was not allowed to plead guilty, of course. 'All you could reasonably plead guilty to,' the lawyer said, 'would be damned carelessness; and that isn't what you're charged with.'

The preoccupation which, through the two days of the case and during the following week, saved Edward from half the anguish of feeling himself started at, judged a fool to the point of crime, and publicly humiliated by condemnation, was given him, unwittingly, by the kindness of an Old Bailey warder. On the first day, after he had been fetched from his cell, there was a delay before they could go into court. And seeing the accused dejected almost to tears, this man, himself a victim for his face was hideously deformed by an old war-wound, gave him the paper to look at.

It was the *Daily Sketch*, and after Edward had seen the front page and jumped to his feet with an exclamation as if he were in sudden intolerable pain, his first idea was that the warder had played a viciously cruel joke on him. The news on that page was conveyed by a huge photograph of Celia, in itself an act of sadism, for she had been caught in the act of talking with some kind of passionate feeling, which might have been anger or grief or love: her mouth was wide open and her face ravaged by lines of distress. There were two Italian policemen in the background. The headline was NAPLES

POLICE SEIZE ENGLISH WIFE and the sub-headline CELIA TILLOTSON CHARGED. The text, in very large type, was short. Edward had read, *Celia, attractive Paris-dressed wife of Edward Tillotson, wealthy business-man inventor whose trial at the Old Bailey on a charge of . . .* when the paper was taken out of his hands and the warder, referring to a stir which Edward had hardly noticed, said, 'That's for us.' Edward said, 'For Christ's sake let me finish, that's my wife.' The warder said they could not keep the court waiting and as Edward either could or would not move, he and another man caught hold of him. He did not resist; he did not know exactly what was happening. He felt as if he had been in a serious accident. He was pushed up some stairs and suddenly, hideously, emerged like a pantomime devil into the focus point of hundreds of stares. It must have been obvious that he was either ill or distracted, for when a wigged and gowned person below the bench rose and addressed him, the judge, an old man with a curiously naked-looking face, held up a hand and the clerk fell silent. The judge then said, 'Is the accused unwell?' For a moment Edward simply stared at him, unable to bring his mind to bear. Finally, he said, 'No, sir, my lord . . . I . . .'

'Try and pull yourself together,' the old man said, neither kindly nor unkindly, as if telling a cog to go round and round more evenly.

The clerk went on with his reading. Edward did not hear what he was saying. It must, of course, be for smashing Gela's Demeter that she had been arrested. But what had they done with her, where was she, what was happening, had she been tried, was she in prison, what sort of punishment did Italian courts inflict for what she had done . . . ? . . . A voice stopped talking. There was a silence. Edward heard his advocate say, 'My client wishes to plead not guilty, m'lud,' and it suddenly and incongruously came into Edward's head that that was about two guineas' worth of pleading. Edward said, 'Guilty—I mean, not guilty.' The judge, without looking up from his papers, said, 'We should be grateful for the accused's attention. Does he mean guilty or not guilty?' 'Not guilty,' Edward said. He made an effort to put Celia's predicament out of his mind. He looked hard at the jury but saw only that they had the usual number of limbs and features, twenty-four eyes, arms and probably, although he could not see them, legs; twelve sketches of faces, two female. A man in a wig and gown was on his feet, talking suavely, with occasional emphasis and rare gestures. But Edward could not listen, he was inwardly and futilely struggling with the

invisible and unbreakable bonds that held him there, in that well-made wooden box, strong as a coffin, even stronger; and unable to go to Celia. A strange thought crossed his mind: he was free of his self for the first time in his life; but firmly bound.

His pleader stood up; he had reddish hair visible under the absurdly cocked-up queue of his little wig. There was an argument. The judge said something and Edward's man sat down. The business of taking evidence started. People, most of whom he knew, appeared in the box, took an oath, answered questions and gave way to others. Sometimes Edward attended; most of the time he did not. He had no real interest in all this. It was tedious. Would it be like this for Celia? As far as he knew it was different, an examining magistrate would establish all the facts beforehand. But she too would have to appear in a court, would be required to explain an act which was inexplicable, which, taken out of context, was either vicious or mad. Her situation was a very dangerous one; any attempt she might already have made to convey that huge bribe to the Sestis . . . was it that she had been arrested for, or that as well as the other? Or she might, if Italian courts allowed bail, still try to pay over the money and be caught red-handed by the police. Frantic under constraint, Edward began to fidget, suffered a fit of coughing and was given a glass of water. He put his head in his hands and shut his eyes. Then there was a stirring, a rise in noise level; Edward opened his eyes. The judge was leaving the court. There was a coughing and chattering. The warder said, 'This way, sir, if you please' and he was taken to a cell. Someone . . . Evans, again? . . . had sent some lunch in for him. He told them, 'I don't want this, I want newspapers,' and at that moment his lawyer appeared, saying at once, 'Look here, Tillotson, you really must pull yourself together. You're making a very bad impression on the jury, let alone the judge . . .' Edward said, 'Can you get newspapers in to me at once? *Times*, *Telegraph*, *Express*, and some Italian ones. It's important. I . . .'

'Damn!' the lawyer said, and, 'I'd hoped you hadn't seen it. I'm going to get some lunch now. I'll send the papers in to you. I don't know if I can get the Italian ones. For heaven's sake brace up, man! Headley will put you in the witness box after lunch. If you give a good account of yourself, you've got a chance. You could be with your wife in Naples the day after tomorrow, but you're not helping us . . .'

The trouble was that Edward did not believe him. He had passed

sentence in advance. All this parade of justice was expensive time wasting. It may have been that he did not want to believe in his chance. After all, he had always wanted to be punished.

* * *

He had to construct an image of what was happening to Celia out of newspaper accounts: the difficulty was that the three reliable English papers gave the case very little space; the others were more concerned to make a story than to report the facts.

To help him discover what was happening to Celia Edward had only one letter from her. Later, years later, he suddenly asked her why she had not written more letters. She said that he would have interpreted them as appeals for help even though she had made it clear she knew him to be in no position to help her. And then she said, 'Besides, it was my turn to be secretive and alone and shut you out because I was too ungenerous to receive help or even consolation much less ask for it.' She was passing his chair on the way to the kitchen in the ugly new flat over the television shop when she said that. It was two months after Edward had come out of prison. He caught her by the wrist and said, 'You don't feel like that now, though?' She stopped and kissed the top of his head and said, 'God, you're nearly bald! That ought to be grounds for divorce. I married you for your fine head of hair.'

* * *

One letter then was all he had, and those newspaper accounts. And yet he was the only person in the world apart from herself who knew all that she was doing and thinking. Edward knew, what nobody else did, that she had the money to pay the enormous fine which would be imposed by the Italian court. He knew her dramatically simple dilemma: either she went to prison or David did, depending on how she spent that money, whether on bribing Enrico Sesti or paying the fine into court. That was how he saw, how he chose to see, it at the time. It seems that catastrophe in a man's life simplifies judgements, and for a while the highly 'theoretical' black and white values we are supposed to live by become valid. They can become the basis of action, just as imaginary numbers can yield the mathematical physicist practical results. For Edward, brooding in his cell below the court, or in the meaner cell at Wormwood Scrubs where he was kept pending his removal to the new penal settlement at Grovond Ponds, Celia became that crudely simple figure, the Heroine. The physiognomy which life had composed for her was stripped off in a matter of hours, to reveal the girl, golden

and splendid and made by Edward out of imagination, whom he had loved from the day he took her and her mother into his old car out of the rain.

* * *

That was what he had to tell her on the very day they moved him to Grovend Ponds. He had not been in the place an hour when he was sent for to the governor's office, and there she was talking to the governor, who said, 'This isn't according to rules but I have a certain amount of discretion'; and referring to the way Edward was staring at Celia, 'It's all right, man, she isn't a ghost! I'll be in the next room,' he added. They watched him go and Celia said, 'Old Fleet Street connections come in handy sometimes,' but before she could say any more Edward began to talk, wanting to know by what uncovenanted mercy she was there who, according to his vision, should have been in a worse prison than his own by now. He was fluent at first in telling his immense admiration for the way she had behaved only faltering when he saw consternation in her eyes, and halting to silence when she began to flush as if his praise were shameful, a silence which she filled by rising and coming to him and saying, 'Edward, it wasn't like that. How could it have been, I mean even if . . .'

'You mean you were not in danger, didn't have that choice to make?'

'For two days, yes, it's true, it was like that. David or me. Don't ask me what I would have done. I don't know. Anyway, he's home, and in a nursing home near Canterbury.'

'You've worked miracles,' Edward said, but the flatness of his tone, in contrast with the rather exalted note he had struck at first, worried Celia. She said, 'Oh dear, I'm sorry I wasn't . . .'

but before she completed that rueful apology she saw that for the time being she would do better not to make a little joke of his having raised her to heroic rank.

Before he left prison Edward knew the facts, of course, but it must have been more than a year before they really talked about them, on an early-closing day when they left the shop and went out into the country, and he was lying on his stomach with a portable microscope between his eyes and a few square millimetres of turf, indulging a passionate new interest in detail, in the very small, in the texture of a grass-blade or a crumb of soil rather than of a universe or of a society. He did not know what minute movement or complex of forms in the microscope field set off the train of associated

ideas which led back to the subject he suddenly broached, of how his false vision of her conduct had occupied his mind to the exclusion of degrading self-hatred throughout his trial and through the first week of his punishment, excepting for one brief lapse into violence which occurred at the time of his first prison bath.

'Sweet idiot!' Celia said, prodding at his magnifying glass with her toe to distract his attention from the narrow leaf of *Festuca ovina* he was studying, 'What were you thinking of? It wasn't, it never is, like that nowadays. We play in farce, not tragedy. It's partly a matter of numbers. Joan of Arc, one individual, burning alive, was tragedy all right, because there was no really efficient mass-slaughter possible in her day. She was noticeable. Our style is to count in units of ten thousand people, not ones. Ten thousand stripped stark, and the gold dug out of their back teeth, and themselves packed into cyanide gas chambers. That, if you come to think of it, is farce.'

Edward protested. 'Farce,' she insisted, 'farce. We are too numerous and therefore individually too trivial to be anything but ridiculous. One can't rise even to comedy now. I know I didn't, anyway. It was all rough knock-about, crazy gang . . .'

They rose and walked on beside a hedge of hazel whose catkins were each the nucleus of a small golden cloud of minutely agitated pollen grains. The ditch under the hedge was already gold-starred with celandine. Now Edward had to excuse what had been his sentimentality. He said, 'Oh, well, myths are useful in adversity, if you'll pass so dignified a word for what I'd been undergoing. You were my myth. One chooses either that simplicity, or the death of the heart.'

'Of course.'

And after all for two days she had in fact faced the choice Edward had imagined. But only because the fool of a lawyer found for her by the British consulate had not realized that she could know nothing whatever of the, to an Englishwoman, inconceivable gentleness of Italian law, its un-British respect for the human being instead of for property. While Celia ignorantly faced the prospect of being fined at least the value of the thing she had broken, and of going to prison if, having paid Sesti his bribe, she could not find the money for the fine, the truth of her predicament was very different. It turned out that the maximum fine which could be inflicted on her was 8,000 lire, at the time about £5. True, a prison sentence of three months without the option might be passed on her,

but as a first offender she would in no circumstances be required to serve it.

'When I first heard that,' she told him, 'for a few minutes I felt more like crying than laughing, which rather looks as if I had braced myself for the heroic role. Laughter wasn't long delayed, though. The fact was I never stood in the slightest danger, for it seemed that no Italian judge would send a foreigner to prison for anything less than a crime against the person; he'd simply tell the nearest convenient *Prefettura* to bundle her over the frontier as fast as possible. I should not have been facing the martyrdom you imagined for me even if I'd wrecked the entire contents of the Pitti palace and the Uffizzi gallery.'

And, speaking gently, as if she knew that what she had to say must give him pain, 'And there was something else you overlooked. Darling, how was I to pay a fine of several thousand pounds without giving the whole game away, without having the Italian court or the British Consul or some other official nosy-parker ask how I got the money, when what this free and glorious commonwealth allowed us to take abroad, of our own money, was a hundred pounds, at the time? You see what I meant about farce? There aren't any grand gestures for us, my dear. They're against the bye-laws.'

For three or four minutes Edward watched, in silence, a small party of ants dismembering the corpse of a beetle. Here were creatures whose bodies were as complex as his own, who possessed nerves and brains, traditions incalculably more ancient than man's, a social system so far beyond comparison more perfect than man's that its influence extended to the physical attributes of its citizens. These creatures, though, had no selves: they had sacrificed them, but unwittingly, to the community some millions of years ago. Edward did not envy them. For, obviously, that only real freedom which consisted in getting rid of one's self, was worthless unless it was voluntary, unless it was not the product of some hymenopteroid communism, but of love. He said, 'There's a thing I've never told you about when I was in prison.'

'Tell me now, Edward.'

And so he told her how his self, his noisy, tedious, quarrelsome and ever-demanding companion, had sprung to life again during the horrible thirty minutes which followed his deliverance to the authorities at Wormwood Scrubs—.

'Wormwood, Celia! What savage ironist chose to put a prison there? They make you have a bath when you go in. You're made

to go along to the baths with a prison officer who watches you take your clothes off and get into the water which smells strongly of disinfectant: and to soap yourself, and rinse yourself and dry yourself——’

It was this which, no doubt absurdly, had seemed to him the most humiliating of his ordeals: was he not a man in a certain position, a position which implied daily, even twice daily, bathing? This enforced ablution was an indignity not to be borne; submission to it would concede them, his jailers, not only might but right.

‘I kept repeating that it was absurd, that I didn’t need a bath, that I bathed every morning and often at night too, that maybe their usual clients were lousy but that *really*! I must have sounded as if, at any moment, I would ask to see the manager.’

The officer had kept saying that it was the rules, that rules must be obeyed, that surely Tillotson did not want to begin by sacrificing his good-conduct remission. ‘But the very idea that I had to re-earn the use of my petty legacy of days by humiliating obedience so outraged me that I went on resisting and in the end shouted that by God I would not do it, they could throw me in if they dared!’ His rage had even carried him easily over the obstacle implicit in the symbolic contrast between his stark nakedness and the prison officer’s uniform. But it was at this crisis that a chaplain wearing a cassock passed through the baths on some errand and halted, his enigmatic eyes on the prisoner’s nakedness. ‘This priest said, ‘What is it, Jackson?’ The prison officer explained and the priest asked for the prisoner’s name and was told it. ‘And what he said then sent me into that bath of tepid water which stank of disinfectant, with nothing to say for myself.’

‘What did he say, Edward?’

‘It was only—“Who do you think you are, Tillotson?”’

THE END

